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Ritalin: Miracle Drug or Cop-out?

Ken Livingston

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BOOKS IN REVIEW: *Diana Schaub, Midge Decter, Stephen M. Barr, Elliott Abrams*

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Ritalin: miracle drug or cop-out?

KEN LIVINGSTON

IMAGINE yourself sitting in a classroom—say, a fourth-grade social-studies class. There is a teacher at the front of the room, but a groundskeeper mowing grass outside captures your attention instead. When the mower moves away, however, you feel bored and restless. Pretty soon your swinging feet slam into the seat in front of you. The attentive student sitting there yelps and the teacher interrupts the class to ask what the problem is. This sudden activity jolts you back into focus; at least something interesting is happening. You're beyond feeling embarrassed about being the center of this kind of attention. It happens all the time, and you have quite a reputation for this sort of thing. And besides, it isn't really your fault. They all say you probably have ADD or ADHD or something like that and can't help but act this way. It's just the way life is for some kids.

Scenes like this one, with endless variations, are played out across the United States every day in classrooms, on playgrounds, and in homes. The American Psychiatric Association's

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(APA's) Diagnostic and Statistical Manual, Version IV (DSM-IV), says that when a pattern of such behavior persists for six months or longer, and occurs in at least two different settings (e.g., in the classroom and at home), it may meet the criteria for a diagnosis of Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). The combination of attention deficit and hyperactivity is common, but either can, and often does, occur without the other. Boys are between five and nine times as likely to be diagnosed with ADHD as girls, although many researchers are now suggesting that there may be many more girls who have an attention deficit but aren't diagnosed because they aren't hyperactive or impulsive and so don't cause the kinds of problems that lead to parental or teacher intervention. And ADHD is no longer associated with just middle childhood; it is being diagnosed with increasing frequency in teenagers, adults, and even preschoolers.

Ritalin's supporters and critics

What, exactly, is ADHD? The APA considers it a mental disorder, which it defines as a pattern of thought and behavior associated with distress and impairment of functioning resulting from some dysfunction within the individual. In the case of ADHD, the most quickly noticed behavioral and psychological patterns are the hyperactivity and inattentiveness described above. Such children typically don't finish their homework, can't complete class assignments or exams in the time allowed, and are generally disorganized and forgetful. About one in five, most often those with a diagnosis of impulsivity or hyperactivity, tends to be socially inept and isolated due to an inability to understand or follow the rules that govern civil human interaction. The adult version of the disorder shows the same patterns, rescaled to the tasks and settings of the grown-up world.

At first glance, these behavioral patterns seem to count as impairments of functioning. If that is so, then it isn't a big step to conclude that some intervention is warranted. But the ADHD diagnosis has become highly controversial in recent years, with much of the controversy focused around the increasing use of the drug methylphenidate hydrochloride, an

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amphetamine, more popularly known by its trade name "Ritalin," as the treatment of choice.

Although Ritalin is sometimes used for the treatment of other conditions, ADHD accounts for the overwhelming majority of prescriptions for it, and these have proliferated since 1990. Figures published in the August 12, 1996 issue of *Forbes* magazine show a fourfold increase in the rate of methylphenidate consumption between 1989 and 1994, a rise so dramatic that the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency asked the United Nations' International Narcotics Control Board to look into the situation. The United Nations released a report in February of 1996 expressing concern over the discovery that 10 percent to 12 percent of all male school children in the United States currently take the drug, a rate far surpassing that in any other country in the world. Indeed, citizens of the United States, most of them well below the legal drinking or smoking age, now consume over 90 percent of the 8.5 tons of methylphenidate produced worldwide each year.

There is something odd, if not downright ironic, about the picture of millions of American school children filing out of "drug-awareness" classes to line up in the school nurse's office for their midday dose of amphetamine. It is this sort of image that fires the imaginations of Ritalin's critics—critics like child psychiatrist Carl L. Kline of the University of British Columbia who was reported in the August 4, 1991 *New York Times Education Supplement* as saying that Ritalin is nothing more than a street drug being administered to cover the fact that we don't know what's going on with these children.

Proponents, on the other hand, include many parents like Jane Leavy, who wrote an impassioned defense of the drug's use for the March 18, 1996 issue of *Newsweek*. She documents dramatic improvements in her son's academic and social performance thanks to Ritalin. Similar testimonials can be found in the growing number of ADHD discussions on the internet. These parents are staunch defenders of Ritalin—this miraculous drug has relieved their children of debilitating stress and unhappiness, they say. Indeed, a temporary shortage of Ritalin, in 1993, following the government's failure to give timely approval to Ciba Pharmaceuticals (Ritalin's manufac-

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turer) to increase production, led to a widely reported public outcry and weeks of high anxiety among parents who feared being without the little yellow pill. For these people, the child's trip to the nurse's office is far from ironic; it is a pilgrimage in honor of one of the great successes of modern psychopharmacology.

Causes of ADHD

Discovering which view represents the better understanding of Ritalin and the condition it is intended to treat is not quite as simple as talk-show discussions and magazine articles sometimes make it seem. The difficulties begin with the fact that no one really understands the etiology of ADHD. Environmental factors from lead to sugar and food additives have been blamed, but there is no clear empirical support for such claims. Nor have investigators been able to explain the disorder by appeal to parenting styles or other socialization factors. Instead, what has emerged in recent years is mounting evidence that the problem runs in families. Among monozygotic (genetically identical) twins, when one twin is diagnosed with ADHD the other also receives the diagnosis 51 percent of the time. In contrast, among dizygotic twins, no more related to each other genetically than ordinary siblings, the concordance rate is only 33 percent. Combined with the fact that adoption studies show that the relationship runs more strongly in genetic families than in the family of upbringing, these data suggest that there is a genetic contribution to whatever is going on in ADHD.

This does not mean, however, that ADHD is genetically *determined*. If it were, then the concordance rate for monozygotic twins would be 100 percent, as it is for eye color. Rather, it means that there may be something in the genetic blueprint for wiring up the brains of some people which disposes them to the pattern of thought and action that gets labeled ADHD. At best, however, this is but a small part of the story, for it does not tell us what kinds of experiences in the world act together with this genetic disposition to produce the ADHD pattern. Most researchers are now convinced that there is no single answer to that question; it seems increasingly likely that

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there are many different paths to the syndrome. That makes it difficult to offer simple prescriptions for preventing the ADHD pattern from developing. The best the psychiatric community has to offer is treatment once ADHD does develop, and, at the moment, the most popular treatments involve stimulant drugs like Ritalin.

The brain on Ritalin

Interestingly, the effectiveness of Ritalin and similar stimulants in changing the behavior of ADHD children has led researchers to think that they know what is different about the brains of those afflicted with ADHD. One of the most systematic attempts to piece together this puzzle has been made by James McCracken, professor of psychiatry at UCLA and his colleagues Steven Pliszka and James Maas, both professors of psychiatry at the University of Texas Health Science Center in San Antonio. Writing in the March 1996 issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, they proposed what is known in the community of ADHD researchers as the "catecholamine hypothesis" to explain what is wrong in the brains of people with attentional dysfunction. It's worth spending a little time trying to understand this theory because knowing just what is going on in ADHD patients helps to clarify what is really at stake in the controversy over Ritalin.

The catecholamines referred to in the phrase "catecholamine hypothesis" are among the dozens of special chemicals in the brain, known as neurotransmitters, that make it possible for the millions of nerve cells that make up that organ to communicate with each other. When a nerve cell "fires," it releases tiny amounts of these chemicals into the small gaps, called synapses, that separate it from the cells to which it sends connections. These chemicals diffuse across the gap and attach themselves to special receptors on the receiving cell. Upon attaching, they change the chemical balance inside the receiving cell, making it more or less likely to fire in its own turn. All of the activities of the mind, including those that make it possible for you to read these sentences, are the result of quadrillions of such events taking place every second in the brain.

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But these electrochemical processes must occur at the right levels of intensity and in the right patterns for the mind to function effectively. Too much of a neurotransmitter, or too little, being released in various parts of the brain can lead to a variety of disorders. For example, a deficit of a neurotransmitter called dopamine, one of the main classes of catecholamines, means that it can't send the right messages to control the contractions in the body's muscles, and one sees, as a result, the tremors of Parkinson's disease.

Pliszka, McCracken, and Maas have proposed that ADHD is such a neurotransmitter dysfunction, in this case a catecholamine imbalance. The catecholamines are used by many different circuits in the brain, but these researchers suggest that when there is an imbalance in the circuits that control attention, some form of ADHD is the result. Although these are among the most complex systems in all of nature, the basic logic of their hypothesis is simple enough. Controlling attention means that one has to be able to do two things. On the one hand, one has to be able to stay focused on a task or activity in the face of unavoidable distractions from the world outside and from one's own thoughts and sensations. But there has to be a way to *disengage* and then shift attention to a different activity if the need arises. A person's being too focused and unable to disengage can be just as much a problem as his not being able to stay focused in the first place. A balance must be struck, and that's what the attention circuits are supposed to do.

But what is the right balance? The answer is, and this is the most important point, *the right balance must be appropriate to the kinds of tasks and situations one encounters*. The balance is likely to be different for someone trading commodities in the pit of the Chicago Mercantile Exchange, a surgeon performing a delicate operation in a hospital, or a parent trying to cook dinner and keep an eye on the baby at the same time. And the precise nature of that balance is related in a complex way to the balance of the catecholamines in the attention circuits.

Stimulant drugs such as Ritalin affect that balance by increasing the amount of time that catecholamine molecules remain active in certain synapses. Exactly where the balance is

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reset is still unclear and may vary from one person to the next. The complex neurophysiology of these circuits may also help to explain why many school-age children, and even more preschoolers and adults, don't seem to respond positively to methylphenidate but do respond to other stimulants like dextroamphetamine. These drugs are very similar in their effects, but the differences can be important in a circuit this complex. About 70 percent of the children diagnosed with ADHD will respond to one of the amphetamines, most of them to Ritalin. Of the remaining 30 percent, at least one-half will show improvement when they are given one of a class of anti-depressant drugs also known to affect the catecholamine neurotransmitters. And some children do not respond to any of these drug therapies.

The history of ADHD diagnosis

So far there is no way to know before the fact which drugs, if any, will be useful for a given child. Only trial and error reveals which drug treatment will improve the troublesome pattern of behavior. And that suggests that the diagnostic criteria for establishing the presence of ADHD are incomplete.

Indeed, although many physicians use the drug as a diagnostic tool—in other words, if Ritalin seems to improve attention, the patient is assumed to have ADHD—an improvement in attentional control after taking a drug like Ritalin does not, in fact, establish the diagnosis of ADHD. Studies conducted during the mid seventies to early eighties by Judith Rapaport of the National Institutes of Mental Health clearly showed that stimulant drugs improve the performance of most people, regardless of whether they have a diagnosis of ADHD, on tasks requiring good attention. Indeed, this probably explains the high levels of "self-medication" around the world (stimulants like caffeine and nicotine, for example). Particularly interesting is the fact that cocaine, still reputed to be the illegal drug of choice in the world of the young, upwardly mobile, and highly focused crowd, has a psychopharmacology that is very similar to that of methylphenidate. In short, even if you have never been diagnosed as having a problem paying attention, many of these drugs will improve your focus and perfor-

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mance. The fact that a child is more attentive while taking Ritalin doesn't then mean that he has a documentable mental disorder.

So how is it decided that a child, or adult, should be considered attentionally disordered? The answer has varied over the last 40 years. In 1957, the first APA Diagnostic and Statistical Manual contained no mention of any disorder remotely like ADHD. By 1968, however, when DSM-II was published, there was a new diagnostic category known as "hyperkinetic reaction of childhood." The use of the term "reaction" here is significant, because the APA makes a distinction between a *disorder* and a *reaction*, the latter suggesting a milder, possibly less chronic condition. It wasn't until the appearance of DSM-III, in 1980, that attention deficit *disorder* or ADD was recognized. At that time, a distinction was made between ADD with hyperactivity (ADD/H) and without (ADD/WO). By 1987, the APA found it necessary to revise its manual again, and, in DSM-III-R (for revised), it was decided that there was a single dimension of disorder known by the now-familiar ADHD designation. However, by the time of the 1994 publication of DSM-IV, diagnosticians were convinced that the earlier DSM-III distinctions had been closer to the mark, and they proposed the current classification system with its three subtypes (with hyperactivity only, with inattention only, and the combined form).

Why has it been so difficult to stabilize the diagnostic criteria for ADHD? There are several possible answers. One of them is that the disorder itself is subtle and difficult to detect in all but extreme cases. This explanation is similar to ones that physicians offer when challenged to defend the diagnosis of chronic fatigue syndrome, a medical condition that, like ADHD, wasn't even in the diagnostician's toolbox a few decades ago. One who wanted to defend the diagnosis could argue that the disorders were known, at least in extreme cases, but that there were other, more folk-psychological explanations for these patterns which prevented people from seeing them as true disorders. People with chronic fatigue syndrome were simply thought to be "malingering." And children with ADHD were thought to be either "slow," if the problem was inattention, or "wild," if the problem was impulsivity. The

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shift to viewing ADHD as a mental disorder could be seen, from this vantage, as an enlightened move.

But there is another reason why the criteria for ADHD might have been so difficult to articulate, and it calls into question the very foundation of the APA's diagnostic system. The APA has made the decision to formulate its diagnoses as categories of disorder. This means that one either does or does not have ADHD, or obsessive-compulsive disorder, or conduct disorder, or what-have-you. The alternative would be to focus on dimensions of difference. Our growing understanding of how we pay attention makes it clear that attentional capacities are measurable on dimensions of persistence, distractibility, impulsivity, flexibility, and control. These different factors define a multi-dimensional space of possibilities for how we pay attention, and each of us occupies a unique region in that space.

From this perspective, diagnosing a child as having an attentional disorder seems to require drawing lines along the various continua and deciding that people on one side are normal and those on the other are not. Somewhere between the person with exquisite control over the focus of his attention and the befuddled scatterbrain, we judge the attention-control system to be broken and in need of treatment.

Theory and practice of diagnosis

But how are we to decide which side of the line a given person is on? There are, as it turns out, two answers to this question. One is the official answer, and the other reflects what actually happens in the offices of school psychologists and pediatricians.

Officially, experts make very specific and stringent recommendations about how to correctly diagnose ADHD. Dennis Cantwell, in a recent review of the last decade of research on ADHD for the August 1996 issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry,* summarizes the current recommendations. The diagnosis should begin with thorough interviews of anyone who acts as parent to the child. The goal is to establish, in detail, under what circumstances the presenting symptoms occur and to take a complete developmental, medical, and family history. Following these inter-

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views, the clinician should interview the child in order to elicit his view of the problem. This interview should include screening for other problems that might be the real source of difficulty, including other mental disorders (depression, anxiety, hallucinations, etc.). The child should also be given a thorough medical examination to rule out neurological or sensory problems (poor hearing or eyesight, for example) as the cause of symptoms. The child should then be given tests of intelligence and achievement, and the clinician should evaluate questionnaires filled out by both parents and teachers. These questionnaires ask the respondent to indicate the degree to which the child displays the patterns of behavior that are considered markers for ADHD. Further tests may be required to rule out possible problems that emerge during this lengthy examination.

In reality, few physicians report anything like this level of scrutiny before prescribing treatment. In a recent survey of pediatricians, published in the *Archives of Pediatric and Adolescent Medicine*, nearly 50 percent of doctors confess to spending an hour or less with a child before making a diagnosis and prescribing medication (usually Ritalin). Obviously, the thorough regimen of examinations suggested by the experts can't be performed in such a short period of time. What should make this particularly worrisome, even for those who are willing to defend the current criteria for diagnosing ADHD, are recent findings by Mark Wolraich and his colleagues at the Vanderbilt University Child Development Center that as many as two-thirds of all children who meet the DSM-IV criteria for ADHD have other problems as well. These are referred to in the psychiatric community as "comorbid conditions," and they most often include things like anxiety and so-called conduct disorders. This is particularly significant information to have when prescribing medications, because stimulant drugs actually may be counterproductive for children with certain of these problems. Combine this with the finding by Linda Copeland and her colleagues, reported in 1987 in *Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*, that most pediatricians do not adequately monitor the medications of their ADHD patients once they have prescribed them and you have a troubling situation indeed.

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If diagnoses and follow-ups are not being conducted by experts' examinations, then how are they being made? The research literature suggests that it is behavioral ratings of teachers and parents which are most often used to assign the ADHD classification. The parent or teacher is presented with a number of statements such as, "Is easily distracted by extraneous stimuli," and is asked to indicate the degree to which this statement applies to the child. Responses to all of the questions are summed, and the result is compared to established norms. If the child falls outside this normative range, he receives the ADHD diagnosis. In other words, a line is drawn beyond which an individual difference is labeled a pathology.

The problem, of course, is that the decision about where to draw that line is a judgment call. Wolraich and his colleagues applied the criteria for ADHD from both DSM-III-R and DSM-IV to the same sample of 8,258 children and found that 7.3 percent of them have ADHD according to DSM-III-R, while more than half again as many, 11.4 percent, qualify using DSM-IV criteria. Even using the same rating scales yields different percentages depending on the standard one uses. If a teacher has to say that various characteristics, like distractibility or forgetfulness, *very* much describe a child before ADHD is diagnosed, the proportion of ADHD children may run as low as 4 percent. But if the teacher can say either that the traits are very much characteristic of the child or only *pretty* much so, the proportion rises to over 18 percent.

So this is the situation in which we find ourselves. The psychiatric community has decided to collapse a complex, multidimensional pattern of behavior into two categories. One it considers normal; the other it considers pathological (with three variations) and labels ADHD. Meanwhile, treating physicians have collapsed a thorough diagnosis regime into a one-hour visit. As a result, diagnosis and treatment outside the research laboratory vary widely: The number of grams of Ritalin used per 100 population ranges from a low of 0.25 grams in Hawaii to a high of 2.36 grams in Georgia, a nearly tenfold difference. Nevertheless, taking the country as a whole, we learn that the overall trend is toward increasing use of the label ADHD for school-age children and its gradual extension to

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cover adults and pre-schoolers as well. And this growth in the number of diagnosed cases is accompanied by a dramatic increase in the last decade in the use of certain stimulant drugs to treat the symptoms of the disorder.

The new therapeutic education

What remains unclear is why there should be an increase in the use of the diagnosis. After all, the flexibility of the criteria for considering a child to have ADHD could just as well have been used to *decrease* the number of children so diagnosed. Why have the numbers gone up?

There is no existing research to answer this question definitively. The research suggests that changes in the DSM criteria may have had an effect on the overall numbers of children who are considered to have ADHD, but that doesn't explain why the percentages of children who are diagnosed and put on medication vary from one part of the country to another. The best we can do in response to this question is to propose hypotheses for future research. To do that, however, it helps to have a few additional facts about the typical sequence of events leading up to a diagnosis of ADHD.

The precipitating events almost always take place at school. It is no accident that the disorder was long considered to be a problem that did not arise until about the age of five. The growth in the number of children attending nursery schools, beginning at age three or four, probably then accounts for the recent rise in diagnoses of the disorder at these younger ages. What this means is that the first suggestion that a child might have ADHD is usually made by a teacher, often during a parent-teacher conference, and not by a parent. The teacher already may have asked the school psychologist to observe the child and filled out one of the teacher rating forms for assessing attention and impulsivity. The teacher may then suggest an evaluation by the family's pediatrician or some other specialist.

Once this formal evaluation begins, as we have seen, the process can move with great rapidity. A few minutes with the child, some discussion with a concerned parent, and perhaps a look at the teacher's rating forms and a report from the school

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psychologist, and the doctor makes a diagnosis of ADHD. Medication is prescribed, most often Ritalin initially, and the child officially joins the ranks of the attentionally impaired.

But why of late are more teachers making such referrals? The most innocent explanation is that as teachers, and to some degree parents as well, have become better educated about this problem, they have tended to seek professional help when signs of ADHD are first detected. Indeed, there is a trend underway toward making the school an extension of the therapy establishment. For example, school psychologists have been very active proponents of the need for increased mental-health services for school children. Beth Doll, of the University of Colorado at Denver, writing in the Winter 1996 issue of the *School Psychology Quarterly*, urges the establishment of training programs that would "create therapeutic schools in which ownership for students' mental health is fostered among every teacher and administrator in a building." This is newspeak for the idea that teachers and administrators have to be taught how to think and act as therapists as well as educators. This vision of the school as a mental-health facility may already be affecting how teachers and school psychologists view their roles in the system, with the rise in the number of children with the ADHD diagnosis as a kind of lagging indicator of these changes.

Not everyone in the school system, however, seems eager to embrace the therapeutic model of the school. Cost-conscious school administrators and school boards are leery of this new focus on mental health. And they cringe every time another student is added to the ADHD population in a school, for many parents are being informed by physicians who diagnose their children that ADHD counts legally as a disability and therefore qualifies the child for special treatment under the Americans with Disabilities Act. By this law, the school system is obligated to provide "equal access" to the curriculum for such children, which may mean paying for special remedial services or other therapies. Given a fixed school budget, the funds for such services have to come out of other programs, with net negative results for other students in the school. So from the standpoint of school administrators, there is a financial disincentive to ADHD diagnoses.

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Pressure to succeed

However, it may turn out that state departments of education and local school boards are finding themselves nonetheless hoist with their own petard. It may prove significant that the rise in the number of referrals for ADHD tracks the adoption throughout the country of outcome-based educational goals. Outcome-based systems are predicated on the idea that every child can and should be brought to some high minimal standard of performance in the curriculum. These systems are motivated philosophically by an egalitarian view of society; we are all entitled, on this view, to an equally effective education at the public's expense.

But once you have adopted such a system, teachers cannot respond to uncooperative and inattentive students by simply passing them on to the next grade. Outcome-based programs make the teacher directly accountable for the child's performance. Teachers now become desperate seekers after anything that will enable them to improve the child's performance to the mandated level. Hence their eagerness to suggest the quick fix of drug therapy if the child's problem seems attentional.

It would require careful and elaborate research to test this hypothesis thoroughly, but a crude check of its plausibility can be made by comparing the rate of Ritalin consumption in the 50 states and District of Columbia with data from the U.S. Census on whether or not the state has some sort of exit exam or competency requirement for graduation from high school. The latter data are crude, require some interpretation, and are not quite as contemporary as the data for Ritalin consumption; so the result must be viewed as very tentative. But it is interesting that states with competency or exit requirements have higher levels of Ritalin consumption than states that do not, on average. The difference is not large, amounting on average to only about .3 grams per 100 population, but it is statistically significant. This means that it is at least possible that the pressure to get students to perform to high levels in the public-school classroom is leading teachers to promote the ADHD diagnosis and subsequent treatment with a drug that improves the child's behavior.

Indeed, the data on how Ritalin affects performance are consistent with this view. The child for whom Ritalin (or one

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of the other drugs) works tends to remain "on task" longer and, therefore, tends to complete more work. This includes work on exams and homework assignments, with the result that the child's grades may actually show improvement. The child tends to become more cooperative, to follow directions better, and thus to get along better with other children and with the teacher. This has the beneficial side effect of improving the classroom environment by reducing disruptions and time away from other students, and so increases the teacher's effectiveness with the class as a whole.

What Ritalin does *not* do, and this is a finding about which proponents of the ADHD diagnosis tend to be defensive, is to improve long-term achievement-test scores. The drug simply makes the child more manageable and better able to work to the level of the system's expectations. It does not seem to produce long-term changes in cognitive functioning.

Replacing Ritalin with school choice

It is tempting to view this pattern as suggesting that the ADHD diagnosis provides teachers with a new technique for regaining control of the classroom in a world where many of the traditional methods of control have been eliminated. Drugs have replaced the reprimand.

But it seems to me that the real problem may be that the concept of compulsory, cookie-cutter education needs rethinking. In spite of the rhetoric in schools of education about the importance of taking into account the individual needs of the children in a classroom, the current system of public education is designed to make that nearly impossible. State curriculum guidelines and requirements, coupled with further requirements from the local community, prevent teachers from making any serious effort to tailor materials and assignments to the differing abilities and dispositions of individual children. Nor is there any mechanism, of the sort one would find in a school-choice-based system of education, for parents to seek out schools tailored to the temperaments and capabilities of their children. Instead, it becomes necessary to find ways of making children able to perform in the environment as they find it. And, in late twentieth-century America, when it is difficult or inconvenient to change the environment, we

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don't think twice about changing the brain of the person who has to live in it. The rise in consumption of Ritalin is only one manifestation of this cultural practice. Consider Prozac or, in previous decades, Valium.

None of this should be taken to suggest that there are no cases of genuine brain damage or dysfunction that require medical intervention. There have always been diseases of the brain, as of any other organ, and they should be treated as such. But difference does not automatically equal disease. Is changing the child's brain chemistry, by prescribing Ritalin-like drugs, really the most appropriate response to the child who doesn't perform well in the modern school environment? Perhaps it's time we asked ourselves whether the fact that so many children can't learn well in our schools is a reflection on the schools, not the children.

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On patriotism

WALTER BERNS

PATRIOTISM means love of country and implies a readiness to sacrifice for it, to fight for it, perhaps even to give one's life for it. In the traditional or Spartan sense, patriots are those who love their country simply because it is their country—because it is "their birthplace and the mansion of their fathers," as Alexis de Tocqueville put it in his *Democracy in America*. It is a kind of filial piety.

But no one, not even a Spartan, is born loving his country; such love is not natural, but has to be taught, or inculcated, or somehow acquired. A person may not even be born loving himself—the authorities differ on this—but he soon enough learns to do so, and, unless something is done about it, he will continue to do so, and in a manner that makes a concern for country and fellow-countrymen—or anyone other than himself—difficult if not impossible. The problem is as old as politics, and we Americans are not exempt from having to deal with it.

To deal with it, Socrates, the first political philosopher,

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proposed a comprehensive program of citizenship education. After describing its features—gymnastics for the body and music for the soul—and by way of persuading the young that it is natural for them to love and care for their city, he suggested that they be told the following tale: that they only dreamed they were being educated by the rulers of the city; that they were born from the earth and were fully educated while in it; and that, when the job had been completed, the earth "sent them up"; and that, because this bit of earth is their mother and nurse, "they must plan for it and defend it, and they must think of the other citizens as brothers and born of this earth."

It is hard to believe that anyone could credit this tale—Socrates himself calls it a lie—but it does serve to highlight this most fundamental of political problems. Besides, the Spartans seemed to believe it, or, to be more precise, something like it.

Ancient patriotism

It is not for nothing that the word Spartan has come to be understood as synonymous with that of patriot. Every factor, demographic and geographic, and every detail of Spartan education, contributed to public spiritedness. Spartans were a homogeneous people, descended from the same ancestors, few in number, and inhabiting an area smaller than the District of Columbia; a people whose boys were trained, almost from the time of their birth, to be soldiers, to be courageous and obedient, to endure pain, heat, and cold, and, of course, to be adept in the martial arts; whose girls were required to exercise naked (in public), with a view to producing sons capable of being soldiers (and daughters capable of breeding them); and whose puny and ill-formed infants were exposed in a chasm (the Apothetae) and left to die.

They were a people who were not supposed to know the meaning of privacy, who took their meals at common public tables, eating the same bread and meat, simple and healthy fare, while being instructed in public affairs; a people whose law allowed them, indeed encouraged them, to kill their Helots, their slaves who looked like them but, because they were not of the same Dorian race, were said to be not like them, and

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who were a danger to them because they greatly outnumbered them; a people whose legendary lawgiver (Lycurgus), in an effort to do away with arrogance, envy, luxury, and especially avarice, ordered the confiscation of all gold and silver coins, replacing them with iron coins of great weight and little face value, thereby hoping to discourage the accumulation of wealth (because, as Plutarch says, to lay up an amount of considerable value would require "a pretty large closet, and, to remove it, nothing less than a yoke of oxen") and to put an end to foreign trade and the importation of foreign luxuries (because the iron coins would not be accepted as legal tender by any other Greek city); a people whose few poets—only classical scholars can come up with their names—wrote mainly of wars and warriors; and, finally, Sparta was a city that discouraged what would seem to be the natural human tendency to raise questions about right and wrong, or, as Plato's Athenian Stranger put it, that did "not allow any of the young to inquire which laws are finely made and which are not, but that command[ed] all to say in harmony, in one voice from one mouth, that all the laws are finely made by the gods."

Athens produced philosophers (Socrates, Plato), historians (Thucydides), and playwrights (Aristophanes, Sophocles); Sparta, a city that existed for upwards of five-hundred years, produced Leonidas and the three hundred who fought and died at Thermopylae, patriots who loved their city more than they loved themselves, who saw themselves, and were seen by each other, as nothing but citizen-soldiers, who had no existence except as citizen-soldiers. As a modern commentator on the Spartan regime rightly says, "The subordination of the individual to the state has had no parallel in the history of the world."

The new patriotism

Still, Sparta has had its admirers, even in the modern world. Jean-Jacques Rousseau spoke well of it, and Samuel Adams once hoped to build a "Christian Sparta" in America. But nothing came of that, and nothing could have come of it. Sparta, a city that discouraged self-interest and self-gratification, could not possibly provide a model for America. Alexander

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Hamilton had this in mind when he said that "the industrious habits of the people of the present day, absorbed in the pursuits of gain and devoted to the improvements of agriculture and commerce, are incompatible with the condition of a nation of soldiers."

Besides, we are not few but many—even in our beginning our numbers were many times those of the Spartans—and we are no longer, if we ever were, a people descended from the same ancestors. In principle, whereas nobody could become a Spartan, anybody can become an American, and millions of people from around the world have done so, which helps to explain why that patriotic word "fatherland" has no place in our vocabulary. All we ask of them is that they pledge their allegiance to the flag of the United States and to the republic for which it stands.

But nothing distinguishes us so sharply from Sparta and every other previously existing polity, or bears more directly on the issue of patriotism, than the principles governing our birth as a nation and then incorporated in the republic we ordained and established. These principles gave rise to an altogether new understanding of what it means to be a patriot.

When Hamilton said that our habits were incompatible with soldiering, he overlooked the fact that we had only recently fought and won the Revolutionary War, and that he, commander of the New York company of light infantry that played a decisive role in the final battle at Yorktown, was one of the heroes of that war; and that the man he most revered, George Washington, was a soldier, and that, along with John Marshall, the future Chief Justice, and the remnants of the army, he had been with Washington at Valley Forge during the miserable winter of 1778. Years later, in an address entitled "The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions," Abraham Lincoln referred to them as "the patriots of seventy-six."

He could not have meant they were patriots in the traditional sense; they had not fought for "their birthplace and the mansion of their fathers." They, like their fathers, had been born British subjects; they had made war on their erstwhile "British brethren," who, as they said in the Declaration of Independence, had been "deaf to the voice of justice and of

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consanguinity." Lincoln meant, and said, they were patriots because they had fought to demonstrate "the truth of a proposition, which had hitherto been considered, at best no better than problematical; namely, *the capability of a people to govern themselves.*"

Surely there is something unusual in what they did, something to cause us to honor their memory and follow their example. "If they succeeded," Lincoln said, "they were to be immortalized; their names were to be transferred to counties and cities, and rivers and mountains; and to be revered and sung, and toasted through all time." And so they have been; and so they might have hoped to be. They were not immune to the appeal of fame. As Hamilton said, "the love of fame [is] the ruling passion of the noblest minds, which would prompt a man to plan and undertake extensive and arduous enterprises for the public benefit." Still, although the cynics among us may scoff at the idea, there is no reason to believe they did what they did for self-interested reasons. As Lincoln went on to say, self-interest may explain men like Alexander, Caesar, and Napoleon, who used their talents and satisfied their ambition by destroying republics, but "the patriots of seventy-six" founded a republic. They were committed to the idea of liberty and, therefore, to the idea of government by the people, and, unlike the Caesars, they were willing to put themselves among the people to be governed by a government of the people. Tocqueville may have had them in mind when he said that there have been men who loved liberty for its own sake. "A genuine love of liberty is [not] quickened by the prospect of material rewards," he said, but by the desire to "speak, live, and breathe freely, owing obedience to no authority save God and the laws of the land."

Our political institutions were based on the "proposition" that people were capable of governing themselves, but Lincoln knew that the truth of that proposition had still to be demonstrated. Demonstration depended on the perpetuation of the institutions, and that, in turn, depended on a new kind of patriotism. The patriots of seventy-six were moved to do what they did by their attachment to the abstract idea of liberty, but Lincoln doubted that those who came after them were capable of that sort of attachment.

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The god of self-interest

I said at the beginning that patriotism is not natural, but has to be taught, inculcated, or somehow acquired. The question is, How is this new patriotism to be taught, inculcated, or acquired by later generations of citizens? There is a problem, or, as Lincoln said, it is problematical, because the god of the Declaration of Independence, "Nature's God," endowed men with rights; whereas the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob imposed duties. Nature's god created a state of nature in which everyone was expected to take care of himself and, as John Locke said, take care of others only "when his own preservation comes not in competition"; whereas the God of the New Testament created a world in which men are commanded to love God and their neighbors as themselves. And what are the rights we possess by nature? They are the rights to live, to live at liberty, free from the authority of others, and to pursue a happiness that each of us defines for himself. In other words, the Declaration of Independence assures us that we have a right to do what we are naturally inclined to do. Rights then are primary while duties are secondary, derivative, and, even more to the point, conditional. When we pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States and to the republic for which it stands, we mean the republic that secures our rights. Unlike the Spartans who, as I pointed out, were forbidden to question the justice of the laws, we are expected to love our country but to reserve judgment about its government. Designing a patriotic curriculum for such a people is no easy task.

Of course, when properly understood, the Declaration provides something in addition to a catechism of rights; after all, it was signed by men who pledged to each other their lives, their fortunes, *and* their sacred honor. Except hypocritically, and the Founders were not hypocrites, such a pledge cannot be made by selfish, or simply self-interested, men. Yet, on the face of the document, the rights are plain, whereas the duties have to be discovered. It is not strange that we should have an American Civil Liberties Union, and not an American Civil Duties Union.

The Founders were aware of the danger that we would claim our rights and even, as has proved to be the case, that

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we would convert many an interest into a right, and all this while neglecting our duties. That is why Madison and his Federalist colleagues resisted the demand made by Patrick Henry and other Anti-Federalists that a bill of natural rights, similar to that in the Virginia Declaration of Rights, be affixed to the Constitution, indeed, be attached to it as a preamble. And that is why Hamilton, in *Federalist* 84, was so emphatic in insisting that the Constitution itself is a bill of rights. Having established a free government—no simple task—they saw the necessity to gain support for it and feared that that support would be jeopardized by giving rights, especially natural rights, pride of place in the Constitution.

The late Herbert Storing made their point with a couple of questions. "Does a constant emphasis on unalienable natural rights foster good citizenship or a sense of community?" he asked. "Does a constant emphasis on the right to abolish government foster the kind of popular support that any government needs?" As Storing said, the Federalists—led here by Madison—did not doubt that these first principles were true, that they may be resorted to, and that they provided the ultimate source and justification of government. Their point was that even a rational and well-constituted government needs and deserves a presumption of legitimacy and permanence, and, to quote Storing again, "a bill of rights that presses these first principles to the fore tends to deprive government of that presumption." Patrick Henry disagreed, and, of greater consequence, so did Thomas Jefferson.

Jefferson believed that the people had to be regularly reminded of first principles. In addition to agreeing with Henry on the need of a bill of natural rights, he advocated frequent conventions of the people for the purpose of altering the constitution or "correcting breaches of it." Again, Madison acknowledged that this plan was "strictly consonant to republican theory," but he was, nevertheless, strongly opposed to it. He objected because every appeal to the people would, he said, carry an implication of some defect in the government, and "frequent appeals would, in great measure, deprive the government of that veneration which time bestows on everything, and without which perhaps the wisest and freest government would not possess the requisite stability."

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The conclusion he drew applies just as well to another of Jefferson's proposals, namely, that Locke's treatises and Sidney's discourses, as well as other works expounding the first principles of government, be made part of a university's required curriculum. Madison granted that citizens ought to revere the laws, and that, in a nation of Jeffersons, this reverence could be inculcated by the voice of an enlightened reason. But such a nation, he said, "is as little to be expected as the philosophical race of kings wished for by Plato [and] in every other nation, the most rational government will not find it a superfluous advantage to have the prejudices of the community on its side."

Lincoln's teaching

Lincoln reached the same conclusion. He said there was a question as to whether our political institutions could survive or, to use his term, could be perpetuated. The principles on which they rested had the support of "the patriots of seventy-six," men capable of understanding the "Laws of Nature and of Nature's God." But it would be foolish to believe that the people generally were capable of such an understanding. Their attachment to our institutions would have to be a passionate, not a rational, attachment.

For more than 50 years, Lincoln said, the American people's love of country and its institutions was inseparable from their hatred of Britain; and, so long as the memory of the revolutionary war was fresh in their minds, "the deep rooted principles of hate, and the powerful motive of revenge, instead of being turned against each other, were directed exclusively against the British nation." And thus, Lincoln concludes, "from the force of circumstances, the basest principles of our nature were either made to lie dormant, or to become the active agents in the advancement of the noblest of causes—that of establishing and maintaining civil and religious liberty." His task, or, as he put it, the task of "our WASHINGTON," was to make freedom an object of our passions or, more precisely, an object of our love. For love is a passion, not a judgment arrived at by a process of ratiocination.

He returned to this theme when taking the presidential oath in 1861. Most of his First Inaugural is given over to an

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appeal to the southern states not to secede from the Union, but he knew they would; in fact, seven of them already had. He closed with this statement, words that can be spoken only rarely in the life of a nation, and then only by a Lincoln. "I am loth to close," he said.

> We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion [note again this word] may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battle-field, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as they surely will be, by the better angels of our nature.

But, as he himself had noted in the Lyceum speech, memories, even memories stretching from the graves of patriots, grow cold as they grow old, and will in time fade altogether—unless, by means of a rhetoric so powerful, they could be made an imperishable part of the nation. Such a rhetoric would require a special occasion, and that occasion was more than likely to present itself. For the Civil War was coming, he knew that, and with it would come more patriots' graves. And when the occasion did present itself, Lincoln delivered the greatest speech in the English language, a speech of 272 words, delivered on a battlefield. "We are met on a great battlefield," he said at Gettysburg, to dedicate a cemetery filled with the graves of patriots.

But who were the patriots who died at Gettysburg? Did they include the soldiers of the Fifteenth and Forty-seventh Alabama regiments who made the attack on Little Round Top, arguably the decisive action in what was surely the decisive battle of the war, as well as the soldiers of the Twentieth Maine, the Eighty-third Pennsylvania, and the Forty-fourth New York who defended it? Did they include Confederate soldiers who, to take them at their word, were fighting for hearth and home, *pro aris et focis*, and were led by a general—Robert E. Lee, by name—who resigned his commission in the Army of the United States because, as he said, he could not raise his hand against his birthplace, his home, his children, as well as the soldiers fighting for the Union?

As it happened, this question was discussed, or at least raised, at a peace conference as the war was drawing to an

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end. Meeting at Hampton Roads, Virginia, Alexander Stephens—Alexander *Hamilton* Stephens—the vice president of the Confederacy, said to Lincoln, "I understand, then, that you regard us as rebels, who are liable to be hanged for treason." Lincoln said that was so. "Well," said Stephens, "we supposed that would have to be your view. But, to tell you the truth, we have none of us been much afraid of being hanged with you as President." A pretty compliment, but well-deserved. As Lincoln was to say a month later in his Second Inaugural, "let us judge not that we be not judged." He, at least, was reluctant to judge, and he was certainly not prepared to hang Robert E. Lee, for example, or Stephens (he and Stephens had been Whig colleagues in Congress in the 1840s), or even the president of the Confederacy, *Jefferson* Davis. They, too, were Americans.

In one respect, their loyalties were American; at least, they were the sort of loyalties Tocqueville encountered in the 1830s. He said Americans were more attached to their states than they were to the Union. "The Union," he said, "is a vast body, which presents no definite object to patriotic feelings"; whereas the state "is identified with the soil; with the right of property and the domestic affections; with the recollections of the past, the labors of the present, and the hopes of the future." The war was to change this; Lincoln saw to that. He used the occasion of the war to cause us to love the Union, and in the process we came to love him because he saved the Union and reminded us of what it stood for. While different, love and rational judgment are not incompatible or irreconcilable.

Love of country

The difference can been seen in the way Americans react to the inscriptions carved in the walls of the Lincoln and Jefferson memorials. Prominent in the latter is Jefferson's famous statement, "I have sworn upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man." For that, and similar statements, Jefferson can be respected, especially by intellectuals who fancy him their benefactor because they fancy themselves his progeny. But he deserves more than respect; as Lincoln said more than once, he deserves to be honored as the principal author of the Declaration of Inde-

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pendence. But his words alone, even those of the Declaration, are not likely to call forth our love, either for him or for the country he helped to found.

Now consider the Lincoln Memorial with its inscriptions, the Gettysburg Address and, perhaps especially, the final paragraph of the Second Inaugural:

> With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.

Americans are moved by these words, sometimes to tears; I have seen it happen.

Without the war there would have been no Lincoln, as we remember him, no Lincoln Memorial, no Memorial Day—Decoration Day, when I was a boy—no parades down our mainstreets, in my case down Chicago's Michigan Avenue, with ever-diminishing numbers of the Illinois veterans of that war in the lead, carrying, or being helped to carry, their regimental standards, and the bands playing "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" and other martial music; and no state song that we sang in elementary school, a song commemorating the war and its leading Illinois heroes, Lincoln and generals Grant and Logan.[1] The Civil War, and the ceremonies remembering it,

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[1] The song, "Illinois," was written in 1893 and made the official song of the state in 1925. Its first two verses are typical of the genre, singing of rivers, and "prairies verdant growing," and the like; what makes it unique is its emphasis, in the last two verses, on the Civil War as the defining event in the history of the state:

> When you heard your country calling, Illinois, Illinois,
> Where the shot and shell were falling, Illinois, Illinois,
> When the Southern host withdrew,
> Pitting Gray against the Blue,
> There were none more brave than you, Illinois, Illinois,
> There were none more brave than you, Illinois.
>
> Not without thy wondrous story, Illinois, Illinois,
> Can be writ the nation's glory, Illinois, Illinois,
> On the record of thy years,
> Abra'am Lincoln's name appears,
> Grant, and Logan, and our tears, Illinois, Illinois,
> Grant, and Logan, and our tears, Illinois.

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helped to make us patriots, and not only those of us from Illinois. This was largely Lincoln's doing.

Of course, his was not the only influence on us. In the past, we celebrated Memorial Day on May 30, whatever day of the week that happened to be, Lincoln's birthday on February 12, Washington's on February 22, and Independence Day, which had not yet gotten lost in a three-day weekend, on July 4; and our public school teachers (only a handful of us went on to the universities) were not reluctant to teach us the principles of our government and to tell us that America was the best nation on the face of the earth.

Culture before country

There is, of course, nothing peculiarly American about those principles. On the contrary, they are abstract and universal principles of political right, a product of political theory; any people might subscribe to them, and Jefferson himself expected that, in the course of time, every other people would do so. "All eyes are open, or opening, to the rights of man," he said on the eve of the Declaration's fiftieth anniversary. This has not happened, but were it to happen, America would lose its distinctiveness and, along with it, any claim on the affections of its people. For the time being then, it is the average American's belief that this particular nation embodies these principles that is at the root of our patriotism.

But there are now professors who doubt that a nation founded on those principles is entitled to affection. They point out that America is founded on a social contract, entered into by naturally free and ungoverned individuals, and insist that, Lincoln to the contrary notwithstanding, nothing but the contract binds them to one another. They believe that it is natural for men to love something beyond themselves, and that it is most natural to love the community to which they naturally, rather than contractually, belong. This is multiculturalism, an idea that has spread from the universities to the secondary, and even the elementary, schools.

Thus, although the American Constitution speaks of "persons," and, except for the two references to Indian tribes, never of groups, multiculturalists insist that the country really

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consists of little communities of African Americans, Hispanic Americans, Asian Americans, Native Americans, female Americans (but for some reason, never male Americans), each of them deserving of recognition. They are said to have nothing in common, except of course that each demands to be recognized.

But recognized by whom or by what, other than the law of the country to which they commonly belong? Even as they understand it, does that country not have a claim on their loyalties? The question ought to give them pause, but they insist we are defined not by a common citizenship but by the separate communities to which we belong by virtue of our color, ethnicity, or sex. And it follows that loyalty to community takes preference over loyalty to country. I don't know what part it plays in the lives or aspirations of the ordinary members of these various communities, but multiculturalism is popular in the schools and, as Clifford Orwin has pointed out in these pages, it is an entrenched reality in the universities.[2]

The end of patriotism

It is not, however, the only pernicious idea being taught. Martha Nussbaum, formerly of Brown, where our Democratic presidents like to send their daughters, but now, alas, a professor of law and ethics at the University of Chicago, has recently mounted an attack on patriotism in favor of cosmopolitanism. "Patriotic pride," she says in her essay "Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism," "is both morally dangerous and, ultimately, subversive of some of the worthy goals patriotism sets out to serve." Justice and equality, she says, would be better served by persons "whose allegiance is to the worldwide community of human beings." Thus, instead of being taught "that they are, above all, citizens of the United States," students should be taught "that they are, above all, citizens of a world of human beings." National boundaries are not only artificial, she says, but arbitrary barriers that blind us to our common humanity. "Why," she asks, "should we think of people from

[2] *The Public Interest*, Number 123, Spring 1996.

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China as our fellows the minute they dwell in a certain place, namely, the United States, but not when they dwell in a certain other place, namely China?" Peoples differ, she admits, but they share "common aims, aspirations, and values."

But, in fact, we had no trouble whatever thinking of the Chinese students of Tiananmen Square as "our fellows," and not merely because they erected a Statue of Liberty fashioned after ours. We could see immediately that they shared our "aims, aspirations, and values" and, just as immediately, that the Chinese government did not. We were enabled to see these things precisely because, although not our fellow citizens, they, like all men, are endowed with certain unalienable rights.

Nussbaum speaks of "the world community of justice and reason," but no such community exists. Some eyes have opened to the rights of man, but by no means all of them. A part of the world today is what it was in 1945, when American soldiers came upon the concentration and death camps of Nazi Germany. Looking with horror at one of these camps, General Eisenhower was moved to say,

> I want every American unit not actually in the front lines to see this place. We are told that the American soldier does not know what he is fighting for. Now, at least, he will know what he is fighting against.

The conclusion I would draw from all this is, I think, obvious and altogether appropriate. To paraphrase something said a long time ago about Sparta, "The United States has fallen to our lot; let us adorn it." And love it.

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How to mend affirmative action

GLENN C. LOURY

MY scholarly work on the problem of race relations began with a general inquiry into the theory of economic inequality. Specifically, my 1981 paper, "Intergenerational Transfers and the Distribution of Earnings," which appeared in the journal *Econometrica*, introduced a model of economic achievement in which a person's earnings depended on a random endowment of innate ability and on skills acquired from formal training. The key feature of this theory was that individuals had to rely on their families to pay for their training. In this way, a person's economic opportunities were influenced by his inherited social position. I showed how, under these circumstances, the distribution of income in each generation could be determined by an examination of what had been obtained by the previous generation. My objective with the model was to illustrate how, in the long

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This essay is excerpted from a paper delivered at Boston University on October 6, 1997 under the title "The Divided Society and the Democratic Idea."

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run, when people depend on resources available within families to finance their acquisition of skills, economic inequality comes to reflect the inherited advantages of birth. A disparity among persons in economic attainment would bear no necessary connection to differences in their innate abilities.

In other research, I applied this mode of reasoning to the problem of group, as distinct from individual, inequality. That analysis began with two observations. First, all societies exhibit significant *social segmentation*. People make choices about whom to befriend, whom to marry, where to live, to which schools to send their children, and so on. Factors like race, ethnicity, social class, and religious affiliation influence these choices of association. Second, the processes through which individuals develop their productive capacities are shaped by custom, convention, and social norms, and are not fully responsive to market forces, or reflective of the innate abilities of persons. Networks of social affiliation are not usually the result of calculated economic decisions. They nevertheless help determine how resources important to the development of the productive capacities of human beings are made available to individuals.

More concretely, one can say that an adult worker with a given degree of personal efficacy has been "produced" from the "inputs" of education, parenting skills, acculturation, nutrition, and socialization to which he was exposed in his formative years. While some of these "inputs" can be bought and sold, some of the most crucial "factors of production" are only available as by-products from activities of social affiliation. Parenting services are not to be had for purchase on the market, but accrue as the consequence of the social relations between the custodial parents and the child. The allocation of parenting services among a prospective generation of adults is thus the indirect consequence of social activities undertaken by members of the preceding generation. An adolescent's peer group is similarly a derivative consequence of processes of social networking.

I concede that this is an artificial way of thinking about human development, but the artifice is quite useful. For it calls attention to the critical role played by social and cultural resources in the production and reproduction of economic in-

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equality. The relevance of such factors, as an empirical matter, is beyond doubt. The importance of networks, contacts, social background, family connections, and informal associations of all kinds has been amply documented by students of social stratification. In addition, values, attitudes, and beliefs of central import for the attainment of success in life are shaped by the cultural milieu in which a person develops. *Whom* one knows affects *what* one comes to know and, ultimately, what one can *do* with one's God-given talents.

Social capital and inequality

While all of this may seem obvious, the fact is that, prior to my work, formal theories of economic inequality had said little about the role of social background. I was the first economist to use the term "social capital" in reference to these processes by which the social relationships that occur among persons promote or retard their acquisition of traits valued in the market place. A large and growing literature has since emerged in which allowance is taken of the myriad ways that a person's opportunities to develop his natural gifts depend upon the economic achievements of those with whom he is socially affiliated. This literature suggests that unqualified confidence in the equity and efficiency of the income distribution produced by the market is not justified.

In particular, this analysis has an important ethical implication: Because the creation of a skilled work force is a social process, the meritocratic ideal should take into account that no one travels the road to economic and social success alone. The facts that generations overlap, that much of social life lies outside the reach of public regulation, and that prevailing social affiliations influence the development of the intellectual and personal skills of the young, imply that present patterns of inequality—among individuals and between groups—must embody, to some degree, social and economic disparities that have existed in the past. To the extent that past disparities are illegitimate, the propriety of the contemporary order is called into question.

I have employed this framework to explore the legitimacy question with respect to inequality between blacks and whites

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in America.[1] In a theoretical example, I showed that, notwithstanding the establishment of a legal regime of equal opportunity, historically engendered economic differences between racial groups could well persist into the indefinite future. I concluded that the pronounced racial disparities to be observed in American cities are particularly problematic, since they are, at least in part, the product of an unjust history, propagated across the generations by the segmented social structures of our race-conscious society.

Thus I would argue, as a matter of social ethics, that the government should undertake policies to mitigate the economic marginality of those languishing in the ghettos of America. This is not a reparations argument. When the developmental prospects of an individual depend on the circumstances of those with whom he is socially affiliated, even a minimal commitment to equality of opportunity requires such a policy. In our divided society, and given our tragic past, this implies that public efforts intended to counter the effects of historical disadvantage among blacks are not only consistent with, but indeed are required by, widely embraced democratic ideals.

Color-blind extremists

This argument leads naturally to the question of whether affirmative-action policies are necessary and justified. To emphasize that racial group disparities can be transmitted across generations through subtle and complex social processes is not necessarily to endorse employment or educational preferences based on race. (I will offer in due course a number of reasons to think that these policies should be curtailed.) But recognizing the importance of social segmentation does cause one to doubt the ethical viability, and indeed the logical coherence, of "color-blind absolutism"—the notion that the Constitution requires government agents to ignore the racial identity of citizens. Ironically, recent claims by some conservatives to this effect bear an eerie resemblance, in form and in sub-

[1] See my paper, "A Dynamic Theory of Racial Income Differences," in *Women, Minorities and Employment Discrimination*, ed. P.A. Wallace (Lexington Books, DC Heath, 1977).

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stance, to the similarly absolute claims of some card-carrying civil libertarians on behalf of a "wall of separation" between church and state.

Consider that, as a practical matter, the government cannot enforce laws against employment discrimination without taking note of a gross demographic imbalance in an employer's work force. Yet the government's requiring that employment data be reported by race is already a departure from pure color-blind behavior. So too is the practice, nearly universal in the public and private sectors, of targeted outreach efforts designed to increase the representation of blacks in the pool of persons considered for an employment opportunity. Accordingly, the more intellectually consistent of the color-blind absolutists now recommend, as logic would require, that we repeal the civil-rights laws and abandon even those efforts to achieve racial diversity which do not involve preferential treatment. But is that stance consistent with fairness?

More subtly, how can a college educator convey to students the lesson that "not all blacks think alike," with too few blacks on campus for this truth to become evident? Were an American president to assemble a cabinet devoid of racial minority representation, would not the legitimacy of his administration rightly be called into question? What prison warden could afford to ignore the possibility that racial friction among his inmates might threaten the maintenance of order within his institution? Perhaps this is why presidents, prison wardens, and college educators do not behave in a purely color-blind fashion in our divided society.

Coming up with cases that challenge the absolutist claim is not difficult. Can the police consider race when making undercover assignments? Can a black public employee use health insurance benefits to choose a black therapist with whom to discuss race-related anxieties? Can units in a public housing project be let with an eye to sustaining a racially integrated environment? What about a National Science Foundation effort that encourages gifted blacks to pursue careers in fields where few now study? Clearly, there is no general rule that can resolve all of these cases reasonably.

I would venture to say that the study of affirmative action has been too much the preserve of lawyers and philosophers,

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and has too little engaged the interests of economists and other social scientists. It is as if, for this policy, unlike all others, we could determine a priori the wisdom of its application—as if its practice were always either "right" or "wrong," never simply "prudent" or "unwise." However, although departures from color-blind absolutism are both legitimate and desirable in some circumstances, there are compelling reasons to question the wisdom of relying as heavily as we now do on racial preferences to bring about civic inclusion for black Americans.

Logical stereotyping

One such reason for questioning the wisdom of affirmative action is that the widespread use of preferences can logically be expected to erode the perception of black competence. This point is often misunderstood, so it is worth spelling out in some detail. The argument is not a speculation about the feelings of persons who may or may not be the beneficiaries of affirmative action. Rather, it turns on the rational, statistical inferences that neutral observers are entitled to make about the unknown qualifications of persons who may have been preferred, or rejected, in a selection process.

The main insight is not difficult to grasp. Let some employer use a lower threshold of assessed productivity for the hiring of blacks than whites. The preferential hiring policy defines three categories of individuals within each of the two racial groups which I will call "marginals," "successes," and "failures." Marginals are those whose hiring status is altered by the policy—either whites not hired who otherwise would have been, or blacks hired who otherwise would not have been. Successes are those who would be hired with or without the policy, and failures are those who would be passed over with or without the preferential policy. Let us consider how an outsider who can observe the hiring decision, *but not the employer's productivity assessment*, would estimate the productivity of those subject to this hiring process.

Notice that a lower hiring threshold for blacks causes the outside market to reduce its estimate of the productivity of black successes, since, on average, less is required to achieve

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that status. In addition, black failures, seen to have been passed over despite a lower hiring threshold, are thereby revealed as especially unproductive. On the other hand, a hiring process favoring blacks must enhance the reputations of white failures, as seen by outsiders, since they may have been artificially held back. And white successes, who are hired despite being disfavored in selection, have thereby been shown to be especially productive.

We have thus reached the result that, among blacks, only marginals gain from the establishment of a preferential hiring program—they do so because the outside observer lumps them together with their superiors, black successes. They thus gain a job and a better reputation than they objectively deserve. Moreover, among whites, only marginals are harmed by the program, for only they lose the chance of securing a job and only they see their reputations harmed by virtue of being placed in the same category as white failures. In practical terms, since marginals are typically a minority of all workers, the outside reputations of most blacks will be lowered, and that of most whites enhanced, by preferential hiring. The inferential logic that leads to this arresting conclusion is particularly insidious, in that it can serve to legitimate otherwise indefensible negative stereotypes about blacks.

A new model of affirmative action

Another reason for being skeptical about the practice of affirmative action is that it can undercut the incentives for blacks to develop their competitive abilities. For instance, preferential treatment can lead to the patronization of black workers and students. By "patronization," I mean the setting of a lower standard of expected accomplishment for blacks than for whites because of the belief that blacks are not as capable of meeting a higher, common standard. In the 1993 article "Will Affirmative Action Eliminate Negative Stereotypes?" that appeared in the *American Economic Review*, Stephen Coate and I show how behavior of this kind can be based on a self-fulfilling prophesy. That is, observed performance among blacks may be lower precisely because blacks are being patronized, a policy that is undertaken because of the need for an employer or admissions officer to meet affirmative-action guidelines.

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Consider a workplace in which a supervisor operating under some affirmative-action guidelines must recommend subordinate workers for promotion. Suppose further that he is keen to promote blacks where possible, and that he monitors his subordinates' performance and bases his recommendations on these observations. Pressure to promote blacks might lead him to de-emphasize deficiencies in the performance of black subordinates, recommending them for promotion when he would not have done so for whites. But his behavior could undermine the ability of black workers to identify and correct their deficiencies. They are denied honest feedback from their supervisor on their performance and are encouraged to think that one can get ahead without attaining the same degree of proficiency as whites.

Alternatively, consider a population of students applying to professional schools for admissions. The schools, due to affirmative-action concerns, are eager to admit a certain percentage of blacks. They believe that to do so they must accept black applicants with test scores and grades below those of some whites whom they reject. If most schools follow this policy, the message sent out to black students is that the level of performance needed to gain admission is lower than that which white students know they must attain. If black and white students are, at least to some extent, responsive to these differing expectations, they might, as a result, achieve grades and test scores reflective of the expectation gap. In this way, the schools' belief that different admissions standards are necessary becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

The common theme in these two examples is that the desire to see greater black representation is pursued by using different criteria for the promotion or admission of black and white candidates. But the use of different criteria reduces the incentives that blacks have for developing needed skills. This argument does not presume that blacks are less capable than whites; it is based on the fact that an individual's need to make use of his abilities is undermined when that individual is patronized by the employer or the admissions committee.

This problem could be avoided if, instead of using different criteria of selection, the employers and schools in question sought to meet their desired level of black participation through

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a concerted effort to enhance performance, while maintaining common standards of evaluation. Call it "developmental," as opposed to "preferential," affirmative action. Such a targeted effort at performance enhancement among black employees or students is definitely not color-blind behavior. It presumes a direct concern about racial inequality and involves allocating benefits to people on the basis of race. What distinguishes it from preferential hiring or admissions, though, is that it takes seriously the fact of differential performance and seeks to reverse it directly, rather than trying to hide from that fact by setting a different threshold of expectation for the performance of blacks.

For example, given that black students are far scarcer than white and Asian students in the fields of math and science, encouraging their entry into these areas without lowering standards—through summer workshops, support for curriculum development at historically black colleges, or the financing of research assistantships for promising graduate students—would be consistent with my distinction between "preferential" and "developmental" affirmative action. Also consistent would be the provision of management assistance to new black-owned businesses, which would then be expected to bid competitively for government contracts, or the provisional admission of black students to the state university, conditional on their raising their academic scores to competitive levels after a year or two of study at a local community college. The key is that the racially targeted assistance be short-lived and preparatory to the entry of its recipients into an arena of competition where they would be assessed in the same way as everyone else.

Racism and responsibility

Unfortunately, economists seem to be the only people persuaded by, or even interested in, this kind of technical argument about affirmative action. Therefore, I turn now, in my capacity as an intellectual and a citizen, to a range of moral and political considerations that may be of broader interest but that still point in the same direction. Begin with an obvious point: The plight of the inner-city underclass—the most intractable aspect of the racial inequality problem today—is

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not mitigated by affirmative-action policies. Defenders of racial preferences answer by claiming this was never the intent of such policies. But this only leads to my second point: The persistent demand for preferential treatment as necessary to black achievement amounts, over a period of time, to a concession of defeat by middle-class blacks in our struggle for civic equality.

The political discourse over affirmative action harbors a paradoxical subtext: Middle-class blacks seek equality of status with whites by calling attention to their own limited achievements, thereby establishing the need for preferential policies. At the same time, sympathetic white elites, by granting black demands, thereby acknowledge that, without their patronage, black penetration of the upper reaches of American society would be impossible. The paradox is that, although equality is the goal of the enterprise, this manifestly is not an exchange among equals, and it never can be.

Members of the black middle class who stress that, without some special dispensation, they cannot compete with whites are really flattering those whites, while exhibiting their own weakness. And whites who think that, because of societal wrongs, blacks are owed the benefit of the doubt about their qualifications are exercising a noblesse oblige available only to the powerful. This exchange between black weakness and white power has become a basic paradigm for "progressive" race relations in contemporary America. Blacks from privileged backgrounds now routinely engage in a kind of exhibitionism of non-achievement, mournfully citing the higher success rates of whites in one endeavor or another in order to gain leverage for their advocacy on behalf of preferential treatment. That Asians from more modest backgrounds often achieve higher rates of success is not mentioned. But the limited ability of these more fortunate blacks to make inroads on their own can hardly go unnoticed.

It is morally unjustified—and to this African American, humiliating—that preferential treatment based on race should become institutionalized for those of us now enjoying all of the advantages of middle-class life. The thought that my sons would come to see themselves as presumptively disadvantaged because of their race is unbearable to me. They are, in fact,

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among the richest young people of African descent anywhere on the globe. There is no achievement to which they cannot legitimately aspire. Whatever degree of success they attain in life, the fact that some of their ancestors were slaves and others faced outrageous bigotry will have little to do with it.

Indeed, those ancestors, with only a fraction of the opportunity, and with much of the power structure of the society arrayed against them, managed to educate their children, acquire land, found communal institutions, and mount a successful struggle for equal rights. The generation coming of age during the 1960s, now ensconced in the burgeoning black middle class, enjoy their status primarily because their parents and grandparents faithfully discharged their responsibilities. The benefits of affirmative action, whatever they may have been, pale in comparison to this inheritance.

My grandparents, with their siblings and cousins, left rural Mississippi for Chicago's mean streets in the years after World War I. Facing incredible racial hostility, they nevertheless carved out a place for their children, who went on to acquire property and gain a toe-hold in the professions. For most middle-class blacks this is a familiar story. Our forebears, from slavery onward, performed magnificently under harsh circumstances. It is time now that we and our children begin to do the same. It desecrates the memory of our enslaved ancestors to assert that, with our far greater freedoms, we middle-class blacks should now look to whites, of whatever political persuasion, to ensure that our dreams are realized.

The children of today's black middle class will live their lives in an era of equal opportunity. I recognize that merely by stating this simple fact I will enrage many people; and I do not mean to assert that racial discrimination has disappeared. But I insist that the historic barriers to black participation in the political, social, and economic life of the nation have been lowered dramatically over the past four decades, especially for the wealthiest 20 percent of the black population. Arguably, the time has now come for us to let go of the ready-made excuse that racism provides. And so too, it is time to accept responsibility for what we and our children do, and do not, achieve.

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Art without beauty

ROGER KIMBALL

FEW things tell us more about a culture—what it esteems, what it disparages—than its art. The plays of Sophocles distill an essence of Periclean Athens just as the paintings of Titian bring us near to the heart of seventeenth-century Venetian culture. Closer to our own day, it is easy to see how Modernist art—with its dissonances and anxious novelties—epitomizes the giddy, Promethean ferment of the early twentieth century. *Le Sacre du Printemps* or *The Wasteland* could no more have been composed in 1850 than *Les Demoiselles D'Avignon* could have been painted then. Such works belong to and help define their time.

What, then, of contemporary culture? What does the art of the past few decades tell us about it—and about ourselves? Alas, anyone interested in understanding what is at stake in the "culture wars"—those many battles about values that, since the 1960s, have loomed increasingly large in American society—must ponder contemporary art. I say "alas" because the spectacle that the contemporary art world presents is distinctly

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unappetizing. Whatever merits individual artists here and there may exhibit, most of the established art of our time is pretentiously banal when it is not downright pathological.

Celebrating the grotesque

These are, I know, harsh words. But they are not excessive. We live in a time when art is often indistinguishable from perversity. Everyone knows about the cases of Andres Serrano, with his photographs of crucifixes immersed in urine, and Robert Mapplethorpe, with his photographs of sexual torture and humiliation. And everyone knows, too, that work by these men was supported in part by public monies from the National Endowment for the Arts and other government bodies.

But such well-publicized cases are only the proverbial tip of the iceberg. For every Andres Serrano or Robert Mapplethorpe there are scores of other artists—celebrated and acclaimed ones, too—producing "work" that is equally repellent. It would be a simple matter to fill a book with examples: Karen Finley smearing herself with chocolate and denouncing the evils of patriarchy; Ron Athey, an HIV positive "performance artist," who slices abstract designs into the flesh of another man and then mops up the blood with paper towels and suspends them above his audience on clotheslines; Carolee Schneemann, who slowly unravels a text from her vagina while reading it aloud to her audience; and on and on. As I say, it would be easy to produce a fat anthology of such grotesqueries.

But the problem is not, or not only, numbers. The real issue is not the existence but the widespread celebration of such images and behavior as art. As a society, we suffer today from a peculiar form of moral anesthesia. It is the delusion that, by calling something "art," we thereby purchase for it a blanket exemption from moral criticism—as if something's being art automatically rendered all moral considerations beside the point. A juror in the Mapplethorpe trial in Cincinnati memorably summed up this attitude. Acknowledging that he did not like Mapplethorpe's rebarbative photographs, he nonetheless concluded that, "if people say it's art, then I have to go along with it."

It is worth pausing to digest that terrifying comment. It is also worth confronting it with a question: Why do so many

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people feel that, if something is regarded as art, they "have to go along with it," no matter how offensive it might be? Part of the answer has to do with the confusion of art with "free speech." (More precisely, it has to do with the confusion of art with a debased idea of free speech that supposes any limits on expression are inimical to freedom. In fact, freedom without limits quickly degenerates into a parody of freedom.) Another part of the answer has to do with the evolution, and what we might call the institutionalization, of the avant-garde and its posture of defiance.

In any event, when we step back to consider the nature and significance of contemporary art, we are immediately struck by a number of peculiarities. Perhaps the foremost peculiarity is the negligible role that beauty plays in most contemporary art. This of course is nothing new. The eclipse of beauty in art dates back decades and has its roots even further back in certain forms of Romanticism. But the very familiarity of this situation makes it difficult to appreciate its essential oddness. After all, it was not so long ago that the end or goal of art was to produce beautiful objects. Today, the very ambition to produce beautiful works is, in many artistic quarters, otiose.

What does this tell us? To be sure, the question "Whatever happened to beauty?" immediately raises a separate but related question: "Whatever happened to the art world?" To *that* question, the brief answer—inadequate but not really inaccurate—is "Several very bad things." I will touch on a few of the things that I think are wrong with the contemporary art world. But I want also to issue a disclaimer. "The art world" is a sprawling, enigmatic, often self-contradictory phenomenon; like the dreaded Hydra of Greek mythology, it is many-headed. No sooner have you cut off one head than several more sprout in its place—each, it seems, more poisonous than the one it replaced. There has been plenty of astute criticism about particular developments in the art world. But no one, I think, has yet mastered Heracles' trick of slaying the beast outright.

The good old days?

Admittedly, it seems odd to talk about the art world in this way. In the normal course of events, one would think that the art world was the friend of art. After all, what else does that

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vast network of museums, galleries, dealers, critics, publications, schools, foundations, patrons public and private exist for if not to support, elucidate, and enjoy the arts? What indeed. It may seem paradoxical, but the truth is that the art world today—with a few notable exceptions—has become one of the chief enemies of art. The real life of art today mostly takes place quite apart from the official purlieus of art-world galleries, museums, and so on. Paraphrasing what one of the characters in Oscar Wilde's play *The Importance of Being Earnest* said of Lady Bracknell, the art world is a monster without being a myth.

In some ways, this feeling is not new. In the introduction to his book *The Development of Modern Art*, which was published in 1908, the great German critic Julius Meier-Graefe had many critical things to say about the art world of his day. He bemoaned the "extravagant prices" that works of art were fetching; the cliquishness and obtuseness of many collectors; and the ferocious commercialization of the whole process: "Sales are effected as on the Bourse," Meier-Graefe wrote indignantly, "and speculation plays an important part in the operations."

Nor was that all. What he called the "senseless immensity" of contemporary artistic output threatened to crowd out works of aesthetic quality with works of aggressive mediocrity; the way that art exhibitions were run encouraged the second-rate, the hackneyed, the merely fashionable: "The remnant of artistic sensibility that lingers in our age bids fair to be systematically crushed out by these exhibitions," Meier-Graefe warned. The one shred of consolation that he found was the grim satisfaction of having encountered and lived through the worst: "We have, at least," Meier-Graefe concluded, "the comfort of knowing we can sink no lower." This, remember, was 1908: Little did he suspect what fuliginous depths the twentieth century was preparing!

You might think that Meier-Graefe's gloomy diagnosis simply shows that critics have always been in the business of grumbling: that they are the Chicken Littles, as it were, of the cultural world, always warning that the sky is about to fall. Well, thank God for that, since such grumbling, whatever its excesses, has helped inoculate us—some of us, anyway—against innumerable follies.

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It would be a mistake, however, to think that complaints such as the ones that Meier-Graefe voiced are a license for complacency. For the uncomfortable fact is that Meier-Graefe was right about everything except one detail: the depths to which it was possible to sink. The decades since 1908 have shown that it was possible to sink much, much lower than he could have ever imagined. Much as it might console us to think so, we are not dealing with a case of *plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose*. Things do change: But they do not always stay the same. In our day, the art world and the world of culture generally have changed, changed dramatically, and they have changed for the worse.

To be sure, part of what we are dealing with here is a process of acceleration: All the bad things that Meier-Graefe noted are still around; it's just that there is a lot more of—well, everything. Commercialization? Why, Meier-Graefe didn't know the half of it. Aesthetic apathy, the habit of using works of art as badges of social status? We have become world champions at that game. Meier-Graefe spoke about the "ever increasing disproportion between artists and those who impertinently call themselves such." What would he think of Manhattan in the 1990s? Think about it: When was the last time you met a waiter or waitress under the age of 40 in New York who wasn't "really" an actor-dancer-writer-artist-film-maker-opera-singer-performance-artist-media-star in the making? Granted, some tiny fraction of those waiters and waitresses might turn out to be important artists; anything is possible; but the point is that there are more self-proclaimed artists per square inch in Manhattan today than there have been artists anywhere ever before in history. Should we be happy about this? Is it a sign of cultural health? Some people think so. But then some people think that Jasper Johns is a great artist. There just is no foolish thing that some people, given the right kinds of encouragement, won't believe, or at least profess to believe.

The avant-garde's rise and fall

In any event, the many differences to be observed between the art world then and now are not all the product of numbers; if the art world today seems in some respects like the art world Meier-Graefe describes only more so, there are other

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aspects of the contemporary scene that have no real precedent. One important difference involves what I called the *institutionalization* of the avant-garde: that is, the process by which the late nineteenth and early twentieth century artistic avant-garde gradually became incorporated into establishment culture—indeed, *became* the establishment culture.

This is itself a long and complex story. In the 1930s, the French critic Albert Thibaudet summarized some of its chief features in his reflections on the Symbolist movement in literature. Thibaudet noted that Symbolism "accustomed literature to the idea of indefinite revolution" and inaugurated a "new climate" in French literature, a climate characterized by "the chronic avant-gardism of poetry, the 'What's new?' of the 'informed' public, ... the proliferation of schools and manifestos," and the ambition "to occupy that extreme point, to attain for an hour that crest of the wave in a tossing sea." "The Symbolist revolution," Thibaudet concluded, "might perhaps have been definitively the last, because it incorporated the theme of chronic revolution into the normal condition of literature."

Commenting on this passage in his 1972 essay "The Age of the Avant-Garde," Hilton Kramer observed that:

> the "new climate" of 1885 has indeed become the "normal condition" of a good deal more than literature. It has become the basis of our entire cultural life. Thibaudet's "What's new?" is no longer the exclusive possession of a tiny "informed" public. It is now the daily concern of vast bureaucratic enterprises whose prosperity depends on keeping the question supplied with a steady flow of compelling but perishable answers.

The problem, as Kramer notes, is that the avant-garde has become a casualty of its own success. Having won battle after battle, it gradually transformed a recalcitrant bourgeois culture into a willing collaborator in its raids on established taste. But in this victory were the seeds of its own irrelevance, for, without credible resistance, its oppositional gestures degenerated into a kind of aesthetic buffoonery. In this sense, the institutionalization of the avant-garde—what Clement Greenberg called "avant-gardism"—spells the death or, at least, the senility of the avant-garde.

Born as a child of Romanticism, the artistic avant-garde developed in a heady atmosphere of new-found freedom. Op-

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position was its lifeblood—opposition to a philistine cultural establishment, a hypocritical moralism, a trivializing artistic legacy. The shorthand term for all these evils was "bourgeois," and, as everyone knows, the history of the avant-garde contains a running commentary of execration against the stupidities and spiritual callousness of everything bourgeois.

The problem is that, while avant-garde culture requires bourgeois culture in order to appear avant-garde, bourgeois culture has shown itself to be only too willing to accommodate whatever provocations the avant-garde has been able to contrive. The last time establishment taste—that is, bourgeois taste—mustered anything like effective resistance to an avant-garde movement was in the late forties and early fifties when Abstract Expressionism first entered popular consciousness. After Jackson Pollock and the Abstract Expressionists were enfranchised as modern masters by important critics, galleries, and museums, bourgeois resistance to the avant-garde rapidly collapsed and, indeed, developed into a kind of unhealthy craving. The triumph of Pop Art a few years later not only confirms the truth of P. T. Barnum's observation that "there's a sucker born every minute," it also illustrates the extent to which avant-garde culture, far from opposing the establishment, had become the establishment.

It may seem ironical that the triumph of the avant-garde should also mark its death, but so it goes with movements that are essentially oppositional. Without a vigorous tradition to oppose, the avant-garde declines into a series of narcissistic soliloquies, raging against an illusory enemy that is only too happy to subsidize its tantrums. In fact, we are living today in the aftermath of the avant-garde, a time when its gestures have become ubiquitous but also aesthetically impotent. The obsession with novelty; the addiction to extreme gestures; the desire to marry art and radical politics: These common features of avant-garde culture live on now as a species of caricature. The scene is all too familiar: black-tie dinners at major museums, everyone important in attendance, celebrating the latest art-world freak—maybe it's Damien Hirst with his animal carcasses packed into glass tanks of formaldehyde; maybe it's the Chapman brothers with their pubescent female mannequins festooned with erect penises; maybe it's Mike Kelley with his mutilated dolls or Jeff Koons with his pornographic

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sculptures of him and his former wife having sex or Cindy Sherman with her narcissistic feminism or Jenny Holzer with her political slogans. The list, obviously, is endless. And so is the tedium. Today, in the art world, anything goes but almost nothing happens.

As with any collusion of snobbery and artistic nullity, such spectacles have their amusing aspects. Tom Wolfe has made something of a career chronicling such events. In the end, though, the aftermath of the avant-garde has been a cultural disaster. For one thing, by universalizing the spirit of opposition, it has threatened to transform the practice of art into a purely negative enterprise. In large precincts of the art world today, art is oppositional or it is nothing. "Challenging" is one of the highest terms of praise that can be bestowed on art today; "transgressive" denotes an even higher register of enthusiasm.

Revolt against Victorianism

Now this, I submit, is a very odd state of affairs. Of course, it doesn't seem odd because it is all around us: Every second grant application to the National Endowment for the Arts is about something "challenging" or "transgressive." A trip to the galleries in TriBeCa or to the Whitney Museum is as predictably "transgressive" as painting-by-number. As I write, the Whitney is exhibiting a retrospective of the work of an artist who videotaped himself hacking pianos to pieces and nailing marshmallows to wood panels. A press release from the Yale Center for British Art dated February 1, 1997 celebrates a "major new acquisition by Damien Hirst," to wit, *In and Out of Love*, which consists of "eight five-foot-square paintings with butterflies attached to them, four white boxes with circular holes, and an industrial-type table with four ash trays filled with cigarette butts." With a straight face, the author of the press release informs us that "the work creates its own environment—a strange and uneasy mixture of the lyrical and the disgusting." And this, you understand is meant as *praise*. When it comes to art today, the rule seems to be: When in doubt, just add bodily fluids or waste products. It's almost as if we believe art must be unpleasant to be good—the more unpleasant the better.

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Again, the story of how this came to pass is long and complex. In part, it is an expression of what the Australian philosopher David Stove referred to, in a different context, as the *horror victorianorum*—a horror of Victorian things, where "Victorian" specifies more a metaphysical than a chronological category. It stands for unremitting earnestness, idealism, moral uplift, sentimentality. Bloomsbury, though it cultivated its own species of repellent sentimentality, represents an early summit of this kind of instinctual revulsion.

Not that Bloomsbury had a monopoly on renunciation. Modernism generally represented an effort to respond to the crisis of a tradition rendered spiritually mute and unnourishing. In this respect, anyway, Wassily Kandinsky provides a typical example. In his essay "On the Question of Form," from 1912, Kandinsky wrote that the traditional understanding of beauty, as a harmony of form and content, had become stale, offering the spirit "no new food." The solution, he thought, was for art to split and pursue two radically different courses. He thus predicted the advent of "a great abstraction," which would reduce representational elements to a minimum in order to reveal purely formal harmonies, and a "great realism," which would dispense as far as possible with formal concerns in order to present objects just as they are, unencumbered by any preconceptions. Not surprisingly, he saw himself as the apostle of the movement for abstraction; it perhaps tells us something about Kandinsky's notion of realism, however, that he saw Henri Rousseau as the great champion of the movement to establish a new realism.

In my view, Kandinsky's aesthetic radicalism, encumbered though it was with a hankering for the occult, represented a genuine, but severely circumscribed, artistic achievement. If we skip ahead a few decades, to the 1940s, we find a much more contemporary—and aesthetically unproductive—response in the musings of Marcel Duchamp. In a 1946 interview with James Johnson Sweeney, Duchamp expatiates on what he called the "purgative" qualities of Dada:

> Dada was an extreme protest against the physical side of painting. It was a metaphysical attitude.... It was a sort of nihilism to which I am still very sympathetic. It was a way to get out of a

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> state of mind—to avoid being influenced by one's immediate environment, or by the past: to get away from clichés—to get free.

Unlike Kandinsky, Duchamp presents us not with a reinterpretation but a rejection of art. His "extreme protest against the physical side of painting" looks forward not to a purified but an obliterated art. Duchamp manipulated the accouterments of art in an effort to destroy art and short-circuit the logic of aesthetic experience. Thus there is some irony in the fate of Duchamp's nihilistic gestures. He lived long enough to see his bottle rack, his urinal, and the rest taken up and celebrated by the art world as just another in the seemingly endless line of aesthetic *frissons*. "I threw the bottle rack and the urinal into their faces as a challenge," Duchamp noted contemptuously, "and now they admire them for their aesthetic beauty."

Should we be pleased with this state of affairs? Or, to put it another way, is the celebrity of people like Damien Hirst or Jenny Holzer a good thing for art? My answer is no. As Rochelle Gurstein observes in her recent book *The Repeal of Reticence*, "By now it should be obvious that there is something fraudulent, if not perverse, in the endless rehearsal of arguments that were developed to destroy nineteenth-century Victorians in a world where Victorians have long been extinct." But the question remains: Where did we go wrong? What are we missing in the contemporary art world? Yet again, I have touched on a topic of immense complexity. But if one had to sum up volumes in a single word, a good candidate would be "beauty": What the art world is lacking is an allegiance to beauty.

The eclipse of beauty

Now, I know that this is both vague and portentous. But surely we are in a very curious situation. Traditionally, the goal or end of fine art was to make beautiful objects. Beauty itself came with a lot of Platonic and Christian metaphysical baggage, some of it indifferent or even positively hostile to art; but art without beauty was, if not exactly a contradiction in terms, at least a description of failed art. And I might remark as an aside how often this pattern repeats itself in

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contemporary life: if beauty was the traditional raison d'être of fine art, we now must have art that spurns beauty; if truth was the traditional goal of philosophy, we must now have philosophy that dispenses with truth; if ascertaining and elucidating facts was the traditional goal of historiography, we must now have history that does without facts and that resembles fiction; if procreation was the purpose of sex, we must now, according to radicals from Herbert Marcuse on down, foster a sexuality that has emancipated itself from the "tyranny of procreative eros" in order to champion what Marcuse called "polymorphous perversity." It is indeed a curious development.

But to return to art. The eclipse of beauty is not, I think, often talked about. But its absence has not gone entirely unremarked. I disagree with Peter Schjeldahl, the art critic for the *Village Voice*, about almost everything. But in a piece in the *New York Times Magazine* last fall, even Schjeldahl noted that "beauty ... has been quarantined from educated talk," and that "commerce travesties it and intellectual fashion demonizes it." His own examples of "the best art of our time"—he mentions among other delicacies photography by Cindy Sherman, a dirt-encrusted landscape by Anselm Kiefer, and the "rapturously perverse" photography of Robert Mapplethorpe—are not encouraging. He is surely right though that something has happened to beauty. But what?

At the beginning of his book on modern art, Meier-Graefe defines painting as "the art of charming the eye by colour and line" and sculpture as the art of charming "the eye by means of form in space." Now when was the last time you heard someone talk about art "charming" the eye? And yet, until quite recently, that specifically aesthetic pleasure was seen as being central to art. Thomas Aquinas defined beauty as *id quod visum placet*: that which being seen pleases. Still laboring in the aftermath of the avant-garde, much art today has abandoned the ambition to please the viewer aesthetically. Instead, it seeks to shock, discommode, repulse, proselytize, or startle. Beauty is out of place in any art that systematically discounts the aesthetic.

Of course, "beauty" itself is by no means an unambiguous term. In degenerate form, it can mean the merely pretty, and, in this sense, beauty really is an enemy of authentic artistic

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expression. It is not hard to find examples of this sort of thing. Edmund Burke, for example, in his book on the origin of our ideas of the sublime and beautiful, offers a list of the qualities he thinks are necessary for something to be beautiful:

> First, to be comparatively small. Secondly, to be smooth. Thirdly, to have a variety in the direction of the parts; but fourthly, to have those parts not angular, but melted as it were into each other. Fifthly, to be of a delicate frame, without any remarkable appearance of strength. Sixthly, to have its colours clear and bright; but not very strong and glaring.

I hesitated to cite Burke to this jocular purpose, both because I greatly admire him as a writer and because even this early book on aesthetics contains many profound things that my quotation out of context fails to acknowledge. Still, I think it is fair to say that most of us will want to open a window after a page or two of Burke's raptures about beauty.

How different is something like Rilke's idea of beauty in the first *Duino Elegy*: "Beauty," he writes, "is only the beginning of a terror we can just barely endure, and what we admire is its calm disdaining to destroy us." Or think of Dostoyevsky's contention that "beauty is the battlefield on which God and the devil war for man's soul." The point is that, in its highest sense, beauty speaks with such great immediacy because it touches something deep within us. Understood in this way, beauty is something that absorbs our attention and delivers us, if but momentarily, from the poverty and incompleteness of everyday life. At its most intense, beauty invites us to forget our subjection to time and imparts an intoxicating sense of self-sufficiency. It has, as one philosopher put it, "the savor of the terrestrial paradise." This is the source of beauty's power. It both *dislocates*, freeing us, for a time, from our usual cares and concerns, and *enraptures*, seizing us with delight.

Art that loses touch with the resources of beauty is bound to be sterile. But it is also true that striving self-consciously to embody beauty is a prescription for artistic failure. This may seem paradoxical. But, like many of the most important things in life, genuine beauty is achieved mainly by indirection. In this sense, beauty resembles happiness as it was de-

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scribed by Aristotle: It is not a possible goal of our actions but, rather, the natural accompaniment of actions rightly performed. Striving for happiness in life all but guarantees unhappiness; striving for beauty in art is likely to result in kitsch or some other artistic counterfeit.

The trick for artists, then, is not to lose sight of beauty but to concentrate primarily on something seemingly more pedestrian—the making of good works of art. The best guides to this task are to be found not in the work of this season's art-world darlings but in the great models furnished by the past. Although this lesson is rejected and ridiculed by the art world today, it is something that the tradition affirms again and again.

Art, religion, and politics

One example is Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses on Art*. Delivered yearly at the annual prize dinners at the Royal Academy in London, beginning in 1769, these 15 lectures contain an extraordinary amount of good advice about painting. If one had to sum up Reynolds's advice in a phrase, it would be, "Study the Old Masters." An exceptionally accomplished if somewhat predictable painter, Reynolds himself understood a great deal about the craft of painting. He knew that "a mere copyist of nature can never produce anything great" and that "there are excellences in the art of painting beyond what is commonly called the imitation of nature." But he also knew that without technical proficiency an artist is crippled. Thus he notes:

> The first degree of proficiency is, in painting, what grammar is in literature, a general preparation for whatever species of art the student may afterwards choose for his more particular application. The power of drawing, modelling, and using colors is very properly called the language of art.

At the core of Reynolds's teaching is a profound insight into what we might call the enabling resources of tradition. Indeed, he sums up in a couple of sentences a cardinal truth about the relationship between tradition and creativity: "The more extensive ... your acquaintance is with the works of those who have excelled the more extensive will be your powers of

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invention; and what may appear still more like a paradox, the more original will be your conceptions." There's a lot to be said for inscribing this statement on the walls of every avant-garde art classroom and art studio.

There is one further aspect of Reynolds's teaching that deserves our attention: his conception of the place of art in the larger scheme of things. In this, Reynolds was very much a man of the eighteenth century. For while he lavished meticulous attention on the purely aesthetic aspects of art, he firmly believed that an art whose ambitions were only aesthetic was deficient in some important respect. For Reynolds, art in its highest vocation had an ethical as well as an aesthetic task. The "genuine painter," he writes, must seek to do more than "amuse mankind with the minute neatness of his imitations"; he must also "endeavor to improve them by the grandeur of his ideas."

We live at a time when art is enlisted in all manner of extra-artistic projects, from gender politics to the grim linguistic leftism of writers like Roaslind Krauss, long-time editor of the neo-Marxist journal *October*. Indeed, the subjugation of art and of cultural life generally to political ends has been one of the great spiritual tragedies of our age. Among much else, it has made it increasingly difficult to appreciate art on its own terms, as affording its own kinds of insights and satisfactions. This situation has made it imperative for critics who care about art to champion its distinctively aesthetic qualities against attempts to reduce art to a species of propaganda.

At the same time, however, I believe that we lose something important when our conception of art does not have room for an ethical dimension such as Reynolds urges upon us. That is to say, if politicizing the aesthetic poses a serious threat to the integrity of art, the isolation of the aesthetic from other dimensions of life represents a different sort of threat. The German art historian Hans Sedlmayr articulated this point eloquently in the 1950s. The fact is, Sedlmayr wrote:

> that art cannot be assessed by a measure that is purely artistic and nothing else. Indeed such a purely artistic measure, which ignored the human element, the element which alone gives art its justification, would actually not be an artistic measure at all. It would merely be an aesthetic one, and actually the application of

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> purely aesthetic standards is one of the peculiarly inhuman features of the age, for it proclaims by implication the autonomy of the work of art, an autonomy that has no regard to men—the principle of *"l'art pour art."*

Of course, Sedlmayr was hardly alone in this sentiment. Indeed, even so "advanced" a figure as Charles Baudelaire understood that the ultimate measure of art must be extra-aesthetic. In his book *L'art romantique*, Baudelaire wrote that:

> the frenzied passion for art is a cancer that eats up everything else; and, as the out-and-out absence of what is proper and true in art is tantamount to the absence of art, the man fades away completely; excessive specialization of a faculty ends in nothing.... The folly of art is on a par with the abuse of the mind. The creation of one or the other of these two supremacies begets stupidity, hardness of heart, and unbounded pride and egotism.

Meier-Graefe made a similar point when discussing the liberation of modern art from the strictures of religion. The severing of art from religion marked an important "emancipation" for mankind, he thought; but it "entailed retrogression" for art. "Art was to be free," Meier-Graefe wrote, "but free from what? The innovators forgot, that freedom implies isolation. In her impulsive vehemence, art cast away the elements that made her indispensable to man."

Modern idolatry

What is it that makes art "indispensable," as Meier-Graefe put it? That makes art more than "the diversion of an idle moment"? One needn't subscribe to the didactic philosophy of Reynolds and his "grandeur of ideas" to see that a purely aesthetic conception of art is a spiritually constricting conception of art. By the nineteenth century, art had long been free from serving the ideological needs of religion; and yet, the spiritual crisis of the age tended to invest art with ever greater existential burdens—burdens that continue, in various ways, to be felt down to this day. The poet Wallace Stevens articulated one important strand of this phenomenon when he observed that, "in the absence of a belief in God, poetry is that essence which takes its place as life's redemption."

The idea that poetry—that art generally—should serve as a

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source—perhaps the primary source—of spiritual sustenance in a secular age is a Romantic notion that continues to resonate powerfully. It helps to explain, for example, the special aura that attaches to art and artists, even now—even, that is, at a time when poseurs like Serrano and Bruce Nauman and Holly Hughes are accounted artists by persons one might otherwise have had reason to think were serious people.

This Romantic inheritance has also figured, with various permutations (not to say perversions) in much avant-garde culture. We have come a long way since Dostoyevsky could declare, "Incredible as it may seem, the day will come when man will quarrel more fiercely about art than about God." Whether that trek has described a journey of progress is perhaps an open question. It is no secret that Dostoyevsky thought it a disaster all around, for mankind as well as for art. This much, I think, is clear: Without an allegiance to beauty, art degenerates into a caricature of itself; it is beauty that animates aesthetic experience, making it so seductive; but aesthetic experience itself degenerates into a kind of fetish or idol if it is held up as an end in itself, untested by the rest of life.

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The new museology

LYNNE MUNSON

OUR relationship with museums is based on trust. But while we expect history museums to know the facts and science museums to understand the math, we demand more from art museums. We go to paintings and sculptures much as we do great novels, expecting that we might acquire information, though primarily seeking to experience art itself. We know that we react differently to Vermeer's intimate, pausing interiors than we do to the fleeting images of everyday life. Still, few of us believe we will ever grasp the elusive quality that defines art against everything else. So we rely on the art museum to provide us with the best examples of man's aesthetic soul.

When we visit today's art museums, however, we are often confused. Many museums are altering their buildings, revamping their programs, and spurning the very idea of aesthetic quality on route to the goal of becoming "pluralistic institutions." Yet the result has been anything but pluralistic. In

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reality, the traditional meritocratic museum, which celebrated aesthetic excellence regardless of origin, has evolved into a highly prescriptive institution, more dedicated to subverting the "master narrative" and deconstructing genius than to enriching visitors' minds. In the end, the so-called revisionist art museum is replacing the idea of a continuous and progressive evolution of artistic achievement with a heroless tale of cultural production.

Revising excellence

The traditional museum assumed that the ability to experience art was a shared human inclination. Columbia professor and *Nation* art critic Arthur Danto, revisionism's foremost theorist, has explained, "As recently as 20 years ago there was a certain consensus in moral philosophy and in the philosophy of art that ethical and aesthetic values were universal." According to Danto, a "recent turn in ethics and in art marks the disintegration of this consensus."

It is, in Danto's words, the "museum of interest and identity" we face today. Premised on the notion that our response to art is determined by our race, class, and sex, the revisionist museum assumes that we go to art seeking to affirm our group identity. Visiting a museum is not an intellectual act, but a political one, as Danto defines it:

> To experience the art is, from the very start, to have an interest—not personal or individual, but the interest which has as its object the furtherance of the group to which one belongs. The art is there for the sake of that interest.

A museum visitor who is a waitress only identifies with works that cater to marginalized laborers. Black visitors are only interested in African art—and so on, with as many permutations as race-class-gender-based diversity allows. In the revisionist museum, no artwork—no matter how old or how great—escapes this analysis.

Museums once catered to a single audience: the visitor seeking to experience greatness. Such a mission presupposed an agreed-upon set of standards by which to judge artwork. Connoisseurship—the close examination of art objects through consideration of the characteristics that compose form, includ-

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ing color, line, subject, space, and composition—was the practice museums relied on for determinations of quality. Stylistic differences aside, art objects from any culture were assumed to be striving for this aesthetic greatness.

But revisionists never talk of standards, quality, or greatness. Danto argues that the museum's emphasis on quality "imposed an irrelevant conception of the ideal of the museum." Art historian and former Whitney Museum curator Benjamin H. D. Buchloh has called quality "the central tool which bourgeois hegemonic culture (that is, white, male, Western culture) has traditionally used to exclude or marginalize all other cultural practices." To say that one painting is better than another, one period of art making more successful than another, or one civilization more aesthetically achieved than another has become an act of prejudice. According to University of Chicago historian Neil Harris, "Classification has come to be seen as an act of domination."

Revisionists stress leveling established hierarchies of masters, mediums, and movements. "We do film, we do Rembrandt," explains Michael Ann Holly, art department chairman at the University of Rochester. Similarly, the Hirshhorn Museum's Stephen Weil objects to the favoring of painting over the work of "potters, goldsmiths, tailors, carpenters, sandal-makers, or jewelers." According to Weil, painting's elevation is likely the result of "historical happenstance," when the notion of art was "fabricated in Florence toward the end of the fifteenth century." But if greatness is merely "happenstance," Michelangelo fares no better than a fifteenth-century Italian weaver, and a nineteenth-century French post-Impressionist no better than today's postmodernists. That is the ultimate goal of the revisionist museum: to create a situation where standards are relative, where everything becomes art, and where politics is left free to guide the museum's mission.

From classical facades to basement doors

The most visible evidence of this transformation is the altering of museum entrances. Like their eighteenth-century European forebears, most American museums were built in the Greco-Roman style. American museum founders—just like those who built Munich's Alte Pinakotek and London's National Gal-

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lery—chose classical architecture to convey their country's and their collection's tie to the heritage of Western civilization.

But the classical appearance was more than symbolic. The facade was meant to facilitate the transition from the orientation of everyday activity to that of artistic contemplation. Most museums required their visitors to climb a grand staircase—first to reach the museum's entrance, and then sometimes once again inside—as a crucial element of this transition. The physical work the visitor expended in the task of climbing was a metaphor for the effort required to reach a state of knowledge, of which the museum was a treasure house.

Many institutions no longer require visitors to ascend a grand staircase. Even the Louvre is now entered through the basement. Most entrances have been relocated to a side or back door, often off the parking lot. Visitors now enter museums no differently than they might a mall or a grocery store. For example, until 1971, visitors entered the Cleveland Museum of Art through its massive, neo-classical entrance, overlooking an Olmsted designed park. The Cleveland museum's founders considered "an adequate approach" to be the first criterion for determining a building site for the museum. Visitors climbed a monumental staircase, passed through an arcade of Ionic columns, and entered the museum through a neo-classical portico. An 1892 editorial in the *Cleveland Leader* called the museum-to-be "a magnificent temple of art," explaining that "a feast of the beautiful is better enjoyed when it is a little apart from the associations and surroundings of business life."

Cleveland's original entrance is now closed six months out of the year. Most visitors are ushered through Cleveland's "new front door," the north entrance consisting of a fortress-like concrete canopy, attached to an austere granite-box addition to the original building. Visitors must traverse a driveway, but no stairway, to enter the museum. Director Robert Bergman says he's not entirely happy with the new entrance, though he does characterize the old entrance as "imposing, symbolically" and "off-putting" for many visitors.

Similarly, visitors to the Baltimore Museum of Art (BMA) walk along a parking lot—in the path of cars—to an entrance so small that the museum installed a "visitor entrance" sign to

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direct stray visitors. After opening a lightweight door, they pass through a low-ceilinged alcove and into a largely art-free foyer. Physically and perceptually, the visitor of BMA undergoes no transformation—no sense of readying for an experience of high seriousness. The new entrance is continuous with everyday experience, implying no qualitative difference between the transactions one might have engaged in before arriving—eating, visiting the post office, shopping—and the experience of viewing art.

This was not always the case in Baltimore. Prior to 1982, visitors entered the BMA, whose classical facade is also revealed across a large park, by scaling 27 steps, walking through a row of Ionic columns that support a classical pediment, and passing through a set of massive doors. For visitors to the BMA during its first 55 years, entering the museum was an unmistakably inspiring act. Yet, BMA director Arnold Lehman calls the old entrance "imposing in a somewhat negative way" that said "something about elitism." Lehman believes a classical facade speaks "to only a small fraction of the community," making others "uncomfortable." The use of the BMA's original entrance is now reserved only for special events—like elaborate fundraisers—attended by the sort of people Lehman characterizes as "not bashful about asking for champagne."

However, Lehman admits that other visitors have expressed an appreciation of the museum's original architecture. He reports that he once overheard a group of inner-city kids, who had just entered the grand hall inside the original entrance, comment on its beauty and "what an absolute change in experience it is from their daily lives." What Lehman seems oblivious to, though, is that these kids are as capable as the "champagne crowd" of appreciating the museum's elevating atmosphere.

Postmodern collections

Inside the revisionist museum, the assault on tradition continues. Revisionist art historian Carol Duncan describes the experience of a visitor entering the revised Boston museum:

> The old Museum was organized around the central theme of Civilization. Behind the monumental classical entry facade, the entire sequence of world civilizations followed one upon the other:

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> Greece, Rome, and Egypt ... with the Renaissance centrally placed. The recent addition has seriously disrupted the order in which it unfolds, with the old museum's opening statement now occupying the most remote reaches of the building. It is now possible to visit the museum, see a show, go shopping, and eat, and never once be reminded of the heritage of Civilization.

This description could easily apply to a visitor's experience at the Seattle Art Museum. That museum's architect, Robert Venturi, boasts about having designed a museum that presents "art as part of everyday life." Indeed, a visitor to Seattle's museum is greeted with little that puts a priority on art: a large foyer feeding into a gift shop, coat-check room, and auditorium. Proceeding up an off-center staircase to the Mezzanine, one finds the museum cafe. Seattle displays art in just 30 percent of its space, a third of the space accorded to art in the traditional museum. Seattle visitors must ascend a full three floors before they can view sections of the permanent collection. Art seekers must proceed further, to the top floor, if they are to catch a glimpse of European or American art.

Seattle's de-emphasis of European art is not unique. Most museums are now reorganizing their collections in ways that "subvert" what has come to be called the "master narrative," or the traditional museum's chronological display of art objects from ancient Egypt and Greece to the present. Revisionist museums have deconstructed this program, replacing it with a fractured and fragmented tale that—just as professor Danto suggests it should—emphasizes political imperatives over historical realities.

Upon entering the Baltimore museum, visitors are greeted with a museum shop and restaurant. Visitors seeking to begin a review of the museum's permanent collection are presented with a single starting point: the collection of African, Native American, Oceanic, and Pre-Columbian art located immediately off the foyer. Before Baltimore's new entrance opened, museum visitors, entering through the classical facade, were first greeted with the American painting collection and then the European galleries.

Visitors to the Cleveland museum have two choices upon entering the museum. They can take a passageway that leads past two museum stores, along a cafeteria, through another

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lobby, and into the museum's Asian and Native American art galleries. A more logical move might be to ascend a staircase just inside the museum's new entrance, at the top of which the visitor finds a segment of the contemporary collection and the South Pacific and Africa collection.

When the Dallas Museum of Art expanded in 1993, its collection was also reorganized with a revisionist twist. The museum created "museums" within the museum. The Museum of Europe is home to European paintings and sculpture from antiquity through 1945. In the Museum of the Americas, colonial through twentieth-century American art is displayed not in the context of the European tradition but as somehow derivative of Meso-American work. The *New York Times* observed, "This is a novel and multicultural idea, putting ancient Peruvian textiles, Olmec sculptures and Yupik eskimo masks on the same footing as paintings by Frederic Edwin Church and Georgia O'Keeffe."

About the only art left to speak for itself in the revisionist museum is non-Western. The massive exhibition of African art at the Guggenheim museum in New York last year displayed more than 400 objects. Each object was installed in a way that emphasized its aesthetic qualities.[1] The objects in the recent Olmec show at the National Gallery—from colossal stone heads to delicate ceramic sculptures of infants—were also lit and displayed in ways that highlighted their aesthetic achievements.

Showcasing relativism

The titles given to exhibits of non-Western art feature laudatory rhetoric rarely applied to displays of Western objects. "Splendors of Imperial China: Treasures from the National Palace Museum" was an exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum and Art Institute of Chicago last year. The Art Institute's press release for the "Splendors" show describes the objects on display as awe-inspiring, remarkable, elegant, auspicious, lyrically beautiful, magnificent, wondrous, exquisite, and fasci-

[1] The catalog for the Guggenheim's Africa show, largely consisting of Afrocentric commentary by Cornel West, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Kwame Anthony Appiah, contradicts the formal treatment the exhibition afforded these objects. But the catalog content was probably an effort to appease academics, allowing the visitor's experience to proceed, unfettered by over-contextualization.

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nating. The objects in the show—third century B.C. jade discs, life-size imperial portraits, twelfth-century celadon-glazed ceramics—are in fact quite wonderful. Unfortunately, today's praise of the show inevitably raises this haunting question: Would Western pieces receive as much praise?

The most vivid example of the contrasting treatment accorded Western and non-Western objects is the National Gallery's 1992 blockbuster, "Circa 1492." A press-packet outline of the show's contents describes objects from Africa, Islam, and Japan as "masterpieces." Objects from China are "splendors." The "splendor" of the Aztec Empire is also touted, along with the "important textiles" of the Incas, "celebrated" work from Brazil, and the "finest works in gold" from Colombia and Costa Rica. The aesthetic quality of Western objects is ignored. Instead, these objects are contextualized; press releases explain that the show will focus on "Europe and its fascination with the exotic" by revealing "how far the realities of Far East culture exceeded the Europeans' dreams."

The show was an exercise in excess. The *New York Times*'s Richard Bernstein accused "Circa 1492" of going "beyond appreciation to a kind of complete cultural relativism that refused to make any judgment about the greater historical significance of the West." "Circa 1492" demonstrated how far the revisionist museum will go to bury a simple truth: In this instance, the fact that the story of late fifteenth-century Europe, at the height of the Renaissance, is worth telling. To the show's credit, the quality of the objects was impeccably high, even including Leonardo's *Lady with an Ermine*. Yet, the show proved that you can't simply show a Leonardo anymore—at least not without bringing in 600 objects as camouflage.

In addition to rearranging their collections, revisionist museums manipulate art objects. It is now a commonplace practice to pit contemporary art against older objects throughout the museum. Many museums have taken to putting their collections at the disposal of contemporary artists. Usually this takes the form of allowing an artist to act as a curator. An artist is brought in to display their favorite selections from the permanent collection—sometimes next to their own work, and sometimes with the artist's comments in tow.

Artist Fred Wilson built his career this way: In 1992, the

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Maryland Historical Society put its extensive collection of art and artifacts at Wilson's disposal. He used the work to stage the exhibition "Mining the Museum." The installation, which the museum claims was intended to "disrupt expectations and definitions of museums," consisted of a string of jolting juxtapositions. Wilson laid a Ku Klux Klan hood inside a stroller and surrounded a slave whipping post with five delicate antique chairs. The Seattle Art Museum incorporated Wilson's comments throughout its collection. The suggested starting point for the installation was on the museum's fourth floor where a water fountain had been spot-lit like an art object. Wilson's commentary took many forms: including a Rolex watch inside a case filled with African art, placing televisions on either side of a contemporary painting, shoving seven sculptures and six paintings into a corner of the modernist gallery. The catalog describes Wilson's installation as "a combination of a treasure hunt, a series of elaborate and witty riddles, and a multileveled probe into cultural and racial bias."

Art for money's sake

Revisionist shenanigans notwithstanding, museum attendance remains high. More people visit New York's museums most years than attend sporting events in the city. The *Economist* notes a "boomlet" in museum construction, with 50 science and technology centers and 36 children's museums built in the last five or so years. Who can deny the popularity of Vermeer at the National Gallery or Matisse at the Museum of Modern Art?

Today's museums, however, usually deploy such blockbusters with one thing in mind—raising money to fund their revisionist and postmodern projects. What revisionist museums offer the blockbuster attendee is this: overcrowded exhibitions that make actual art viewing nearly impossible and overpriced catalogs and souvenirs at the museum store, which has been relocated to exhibition exits. Proceeds from these mega-shows are rarely invested in ways that might serve the needs or the interests of the blockbuster visitor. How many $75 Matisse catalogs must the Museum of Modern Art (MOMA) unload in order to purchase a Kiki Smith (creator of the infamous human fluid jars)? How often does the Whitney museum need to

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show its Edward Hopper collection in order to support its infamously politically correct Biennial?

Though revisionists claim that their goal is to create a museum that is more inclusive and audience-centered than the traditional museum, they show a remarkable lack of interest in actual public opinion. When the public disagrees with the revisionist museum—as was the case with the National Air and Space Museum's planned Enola Gay show, and the National Museum of American Art's infamous "West as America" exhibition—museum professionals dismiss this criticism as either manipulation or philistinism.

When asked about these controversies, Cleveland's Bergman, who is also president of the American Association of Museums, warned that museums cannot allow public opinion to "compromise our devotion to freedom of expression." Bergman views this type of public participation in museums' work a free-speech threat of "epidemic" proportions. He suspects such controversy is the result not of honest critics but of "one person or a small group with political or theological or philosophical commitments."

Or consider the dispute that erupted over a neon sculpture by Bruce Nauman that is visible even quite a distance from the BMA. The sculpture, which sits high atop the museum's new entrance (where, on traditional museums, the names of great artists were often carved) intermittently flashes the words "Silence, Violins, Violence." According to Baltimore's Lehman, when the piece was originally installed, neighbors wrote letters of complaint to the museum and to the newspaper; they argued that neon had no place in the museum and threatened to go to the zoning commission. When asked why, in the age of the visitor-centered museum, these residents' opinions had not been heeded, Lehman asserted: "We've always believed that the museum has to take a leadership role rather than being reactive to the community."

Reconstructing icons

Upon his retirement from the directorship of the National Gallery of Art (NGA), J. Carter Brown oversaw an exhibition of ancient Greek sculpture, donning the politically incorrect title, "The Greek Miracle." The show proudly announced its

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purpose: to display a selection of ancient Greek sculpture in commemoration of the 2,500th anniversary of the birth of democracy. Its determined focus was on just 34 individual objects—including a marvelous kouros and the breakthrough "Kritios Boy" sculpture—each displayed to emphasize its aesthetic features.

The *New York Times* blasted "The Greek Miracle" in two separate articles. One critic called the show's title "jingoistic" and accused the NGA of "perpetuat[ing] cliches about art and its meaning that recent art history has been trying to dislodge." Another called the show an "intellectually unambitious" attempt to encourage viewers "not to think too hard or ask too many questions, just be dazzled." *Time* magazine's Robert Hughes dubbed the show "an exercise in political propaganda." J. Carter Brown responded:

> We do share some universal values—the rule of law, the ideal of justice—which came to us from the Greeks.... It would be a great loss to this country if everyone just took whatever piece of world culture they felt they could identify with most closely and abjured everything else.

The cultural balkanization Brown warned against is exactly what his "Circa 1492" show had encouraged. Still, "The Greek Miracle" is the firmest statement any major museum has made to date in support of high aesthetic standards and historical truth.

The compromised version of art and history cultivated in our universities and practiced in our museums shortchanges the present by misrepresenting the past. A serious debate needs to take place—of the sort that emerged in academia over political correctness—over the state of museums. Even though the polite environment of museums encourages silence, the public deserves to hear people speak clearly and honestly about the impact revisionism has had on the presentation of art.

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Black studies revisited

JOHN H. BUNZEL & ANITA SUSAN GROSSMAN

NEARLY 30 years after their inception in the campus disorders of the 1960s, black-studies programs continue to be a subject of controversy—at least in those departments that promote Afrocentrism. To be sure, black studies means different things on different campuses. Gerald Early, director of the African and African-American Studies program at Washington University, has described the goal of black studies and higher education generally as,

> not therapy for the sick, nor fair play for the historically abused and misinterpreted, not power for the 'subversives' to oust the white men and give blacks an alternate world, but rather the quest for truth and understanding, undertaken ... by passionate believers in liberty, in the right of the individual conscience, in the need for the coming together of groups, and in responsibility for the society in which we work.

Yet the reality of black studies at other schools is quite different, and the separatist ideology they espouse is closer to that enunciated by such spokesmen as Asa Hilliard at Georgia

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State University, Maulana Karenga at California State University at Long Beach, Molefi Asante at Temple University, Leonard Jeffries at City College of New York, or Anthony Martin at Wellesley.

A case in point is the Black Studies Department at San Francisco State University. It is one that we know well.[1] During the 1968-1969 academic year, the campus was convulsed by a student strike, the violence of which made national headlines. The new black-studies program that arose at San Francisco State in 1969 proclaimed a radical political agenda whose overall strategy, in the words of a Black Student Union publication at the time, "was to unite all of the revolutionary forces of all the College ... [and serve] as a base from which to move like a mighty storm on all the other departments to revolutionize them."

Some teachers at San Francisco State adopted a wait-and-see attitude toward the new experiment. In their 1971 book, *Unfinished Rebellions,* three prominent faculty members and administrators, DeVere Pentony, Robert Smith, and Richard Axen, wrote, "It does not seem fair to attempt to evaluate the programs definitely before we have really had a chance to see what is being done in them over a period of time." We felt that after a quarter of a century, the time had come to evaluate black studies at San Francisco State. Had it fulfilled the promises made at the time of its founding? Had it evolved into an authentic discipline with standards of scholarship comparable to those in the rest of the university?

Not much was known about the Black Studies Department or its teachings. One way to find out was to attend the classes themselves—specifically, some 38 taught by 19 Black Studies faculty members. Visits, conducted between 1991 and 1993, were mainly at the beginning of a semester when students typically "shop around" before enrolling officially. While some of these early class sessions were concerned with the distribution of syllabi, roll taking, and other preliminaries, most instructors lectured at the first or second meeting, thereby pro-

[1] One of us taught for nine years at San Francisco State and witnessed first hand the disorders that led to the creation of the ethnic-studies program there. See John H. Bunzel, "Black Studies at San Francisco State," *The Public Interest*, Number 13, Fall 1968.

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viding some sense of the courses' scope and purpose. Wherever possible, syllabi were also obtained and the assigned readings examined.

The class reports below are abridged versions of material planned for a longer work on black studies at San Francisco State. Although necessarily brief and selective, they give an accurate sense of the ideas promoted by the department and the academic quality of the instruction provided. For the most part, we have allowed the faculty to speak for themselves, with minimal commentary. The instructors whose classes were selected range from part-time lecturers to tenured professors, but all of them had been teaching at San Francisco State for several years and had helped to shape the course content of the program.

The psychology of black studies

Laura Head received her Ph.D. in developmental psychology from the University of Michigan in 1977. She came to San Francisco State the following year and, after a series of promotions, became a professor of Black Studies in 1986.

At the first class meeting of *Introduction to Black Psychology (Black Studies 200)*, Head explained that a separate black psychology course is needed because "white psychology" has major problems—"it's racist, it's sexist, and it's elitist." Worse than this, most psychologists do not even admit that any problem exists. According to Head, "white psychology ... supports a white supremacist ideology" because it assumes that "white culture and behavior is supreme, or is normal." When black people do something that is different from what whites do, psychologists define it as "dysfunctional, deviant, inferior—or something else is wrong with them," she said. This belief pervades the social sciences, and leads to the proliferation of studies about "what is wrong with us ... what is wrong with black culture; what is wrong with black people's hair; what is wrong with our skin; what is wrong with our families; what is wrong with the way we talk; what's wrong with our intelligence; what's wrong with our personality."

White psychology assumes that blacks must want to assimilate, "because if white is superior, then obviously you want to take on superior behaviors." It is further assumed, Head con-

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tinued, that the only reason "you're in a black-studies course is because you do not think you're smart enough to take a white-studies course, because of course the white-studies courses are better. They're white. White is better by definition."

White people feel threatened by blacks who are not "buying into a white supremacy ideology," she explained. They find Louis Farrakhan threatening because he "repudiates a white supremacy ideology" and "does not want to assimilate"; instead, he talks of "rebuilding a black culture." By contrast, whites accept "the Clarence Thomases, the Shelby Steeles, the Thomas Sowells, who say everything white is wonderful.... They're telling you that you too can be another Clarence Thomas if you just hang around white folks, love white folks, and marry white folks."

Head then went on to describe Christianity as "a white supremacy religion," though with African origins:

> Now we know that Christ was black and the original folks who started Christianity were black. But somewhere along the line, white folks took it over and made it into a white supremacy religion, and made God white, and made Christ white, and made the Virgin Mary white, and made blackness an evil that we got because we were cursed, and changed the whole thing around from the way it originally was. It turned out to be a racist, sexist, elitist, hierarchical religion.

Head deplored the fact that a large number of black churches "are still worshipping a white god." She also took particular offense at the color symbolism of religion, whereby white connotes goodness, and darkness, evil. Rather than trying to reform the church from within, Head suggested that one "go back to the roots" and get away from Christianity entirely.

When asked what she meant by returning to your roots, Head replied "traditional African philosophy." By this she meant the age-old practices of tribal African societies, within which one had "internal knowledge"; in our society, by contrast, we rely too much on "external authorities." This is especially true of universities, she explained, where you are always being told, "'You don't know nothing.' And if you want to know something, you have to go and read it in some book, preferably written by a white male. And then he will give you the answer."

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The vocabulary of black studies

James H. Todd II has been a lecturer in Black Studies at San Francisco State University since 1988. His 1990 doctorate in "Higher Education and Social Change" is from the Western Institute for Social Research, a Berkeley based institution that is not accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges.

Todd began *Introduction to Black Studies (Black Studies 101)* by distributing to the class a vocabulary list with 43 definitions of key terms for the course. "Education," he explained, was "a developmental process which allows a person to think and do for themselves in spite of universal persecution." Black studies arose to counteract the "miseducation" inflicted upon black people, Todd continued. "Miseducation" was a way of controlling a person's thinking in order to keep him subordinate without the use of force; as a result of such conditioning, black people were taught not to think or do things for themselves. As he put it, "We went from a people who built a civilization to those who can't even get out of a block," from "a people of warriors who defended a whole civilization to a people shootin' each other on the corner because of some asshole that somebody told this is their turf."

To illustrate what can happen when blacks think for themselves, Todd cited Ivan Van Sertima, whose book *They Came Before Columbus* (1976) is a key text of black-studies classes. According to Van Sertima, Africans settled in the New World before Europeans ever arrived and served as models for the giant sculpted Olmec heads found by archeologists. Van Sertima discovered that "we was here" before Columbus, Todd explained, and, therefore, "we aided in the inoculation of the cultural changes that were [going on] in America long before Columbus got out of jail." Columbus "was just a merchant seaman," Todd said. He added parenthetically that "merchant seamens in most towns go to jail when they fight and do all kinds of stuff. In fact, it was the king who got him out of jail so they could sail around the horn for the first time in a ship."

Discussing the reasons for the development of black studies as a discipline, Todd declared that there had been no significant academic study of Africans before the slave trade,

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or of historical figures in the African Diaspora. Moreover, there was very little "of any history of us around the world," this despite the fact that "there are *840 million* of us in this world—and tell me how much of a minority we are!" he exclaimed. He calculated that there were "*440 million* of us in North America, not 28 or 29; and I know there's more than about 50 million in the United States, 'cause I know [the census takers] didn't come to *my* neighborhood."

In closing, Todd declared that we have reached the point where "we can no longer worry about race." By this he did not mean that racism no longer existed. Far from it. "This country is *fundamentally* racist—but so is Western culture," he said. We need "to quit really givin' a damn" about it. He added that "you cannot change the spots on the lion but you can change your relationship to him."

Literature in black and white

With her highest degree a bachelor's from San Francisco State (1967), Joanne Gearring began to teach literature in the Black Studies Department in 1988. She has since received an M.A. in English (1990) from the California State University, Hayward.

Gearring's lecture in *Black Fiction (Black Studies 420)* concerned slave narratives. She said most of them were written by a white "e-manuensis," that they "can really get grizzly," and that abolitionists believed that "slavery was degenerating white men" who consorted with black women.

After acknowledging the good intentions of some abolitionists, Gearring concentrated on the discreditable motives of white opponents of slavery. Many white women, she said, believed in black inferiority and opposed slavery merely because it encouraged concubinage. Gearring also criticized the author Harriet Beecher Stowe for making the most courageous and intelligent black characters in *Uncle Tom's Cabin* mulattoes rather than people of pure African stock. In the antebellum South, she said, white slave owners did not scruple to sell their own mulatto offspring or have them work in the fields. She added that George Washington was an exception, for, unlike most masters, he educated the son he sired by a female slave. According to Gearring, the Christianity taught to black

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slaves was merely a cynical ploy of the ruling caste to ensure that its victims learned the virtues of docility and resignation. Those who sought to bring Christianity to the "heathen" were "feeding them a bunch of bullwash."

Approvingly, the instructor alluded to slaves who ran away or hid out with Indians and participated in uprisings, "wreakin' some terrible havoc on white folks" in this country. "That's wonderful stuff, I love it," she enthused, explaining:

> Oh, there were a lot of wonderful revolts. And I call them wonderful because, you understand, I have a certain perspective on their side, okay? I do not have a Western perspective on this subject [that says] that something is wrong about a person who desires his own freedom by any means necessary. You've heard that before, right? By any means necessary. That the equal amount of force to repel his oppression is okay, and you couldn't expect me to have any other perspective on that, could you?

In discussing historical and social conditions, the instructor tended to blur the distinction between then and now, alluding to the past as though it were the present, while drawing questionable analogies between the historical past and recent or current conditions. For her, television and films still evince the "Aryan consciousness" that marred the work of Harriet Beecher Stowe; and the barring of whites from civil-rights organizations in the late 1960s was justified by the patronizing attitudes of William Lloyd Garrison toward Frederick Douglass a century earlier.

The African "mystery system"

Dubois Phillip McGee, Dean of the College (formerly the School) of Ethnic Studies, has headed the program at San Francisco State since 1978. He received a Ph.D. in psychology in 1970 from Iowa State University of Science and Technology.

In his class *Pigmentation and the Experience of Color (Black Studies 555)*, McGee declared that Western psychology could not describe or understand black behavior. He explained that "stimulus/response may be good for a rat," but it did not describe "the world and the reality of the culture for black people." McGee said that he took issue with "the whole concept of subjective and objective" because

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> there is no truly objective thought, and anybody that claims to have one is a liar. That's not possible, because you are a thinking, feeling, understanding, operating human being, so whatever is out there in the environment, it's having an effect and an influence on you, and it influences the kind of decisions you make, so no decisions are made in a vacuum.

McGee went on to claim of the philosopher Descartes that the Church "made him separate the concept of mind and body," and "the metaphysical from the physical." Prior to that time, "mind and body were all the same thing," but,

> around the sixteenth century, seventeenth century, the Church forced him to separate these two things because they felt like mind was the property of the Church, and the physical body was the property of science. And to this day we talk about mind-body relationships, but we don't talk about the mind and body as one. This is an example of Eurocentric thought.

By contrast, in the Afrocentric system, McGee observed that everything is connected to everything else. This university, for instance, is composed of eight schools, and each one teaches specific subject matter that is mostly unrelated to that taught in the others. But, in the African "mystery system," physics and music, or art and science, might be taught together. There would be no artificial separations "in terms of the domain and the discipline of any one of these areas of thought."

From living in this country, Africans have come to adopt "pro-racist behavior." This he described as "identifying with the behavior of the aggressor." Instead, black people should cease to imitate whites in appearance, thought, and language. There are too many places, he complained, "where if you don't act like Miss Jane Addams, then you ain't havin' it."

Some scholars claim that Moses, Jesus, and Socrates were all initiates of the African "mystery system," McGee told the class. That system took 40 years of training and "predated what we would now call the fraternal orders," such as the Masons and the Shriners. Moreover, he declared, "the current university as we now know it" is derived from the Egyptian mystery system. He linked a place mentioned in the Bible called Peniel with the pineal gland, and said that the gland "points to higher consciousness." In the mystery system, ev-

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eryone aspired to ascend to the highest level of existence. The curriculum was designed "to liberate mind from finite consciousness" and "to liberate soul from bodily impediments."

On the subject of astronomy, McGee's students learned that the moon has an effect on humans that Western science "still refuses to recognize." Phases of the moon affect women's menstrual cycles and people's mental health generally. The stars, planets, and the moon influence us "as water-majority beings on this planet," he said. "You're 70 percent water, and you are affected the same way that the tides of the ocean are affected." Thus, at some times of the lunar cycle, you may be "a little crazier than usual."

The class was also told that certain folk have supernatural powers. Some people "can heal with their hands"; others "can see what you're thinking." In fact, "we all have that ability, but it's all crudded up." He has a theory that we have a "pure core of energy" that over time has

> gotten all crudded up with external environmental crud, and that your power to do anything is essentially blocked. And so, you know, I like to talk about a de-crudification process when we begin to wipe away all the crap so that you can get back to the core and really exert the willpower you have.

Black studies against truth

As with any collection of individuals in an academic department, generalizations have to be qualified, and one is always in danger of being overwhelmed by particulars. Yet the black-studies faculty members reviewed here share a common orientation that may be described as black-separatist multiculturalism, with individual variations in emphasis seen in one professor's feminism or another's pan-Africanism.

More generally, they take an adversarial stance toward American life, stressing the wrongs done to minorities by "white America" and the European culture that produced it. The norms of this society are portrayed as alien to "people of color," when not actually inimical to them. The faculty often subscribe to various conspiracy theories concerning Western history, such as the "stolen legacy" claim of George James and others that the Greeks "stole" the achievement of a black

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Egypt and the notion of Frances Cress Welsing that whites have oppressed blacks throughout history because of envy of their superior melanin endowment. Several department members promulgate a doctrine of black cultural superiority similar to the "Sun People" and "Ice People" scheme of Leonard Jeffries, although without his particular nomenclature. According to this theory, blacks as a group are more in harmony with nature, and are more sociable, unaggressive, egalitarian, and aware of the supernatural around them than those of European descent, who display an opposite and distinctly inferior constellation of traits. Some courses feature an eclectic assemblage of mystical beliefs, while others emphasize that a primary purpose of education is to show black, as well as other minority, students how to become engaged in the struggle against the "white power structure."

Gerald Early has cautioned proponents of black studies not to see their mission as antithetical to that of the university as a whole but, rather, to recognize "truthful knowledge, non-colorized knowledge, non-racially aggrandizing knowledge as their only legitimate and ennobling source of power." Given its present orientation, it seems doubtful that the Black Studies Department at San Francisco State will adopt such a perspective at any time in the foreseeable future.

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Measuring Catholic school performance

DEREK NEAL

IN 1980, the late James S. Coleman, a prominent, University of Chicago sociologist, conducted a comprehensive study of student performance in secondary schools. This study was commissioned by the Department of Education, and many expected it simply to detail what types of school characteristics are associated with student success. Most observers were surprised then when Coleman focused on the importance of a single school characteristic: whether schools are public or private. Further, because Catholic schools constitute a large and relatively homogenous group in the private-school sector, Coleman and his two co-authors, Thomas Hoffer and Sally Kilgore, directed most of their attention to differences between Catholic and public schools. They examined achievement test data and concluded that students in Catholic schools learn more than students in public schools. Moreover, Coleman rejected the claim that Catholic school students perform better on achievement tests simply because they are more talented or come from better families.

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He argued that the achievement differences between public and Catholic school students are, in significant measure, attributable to the different schools they attend.

This study sparked significant controversy, and, over the next 15 years, numerous studies addressed the issues that Coleman raised. Coleman also continued working on the topic, and, in 1987, he and Hoffer published a book that dealt with both their original data and follow-up data collected after 1980. Taken as a whole, Coleman's work, and subsequent research by other scholars, indicates that, on average, Catholic high-school students learn more than public-school students of similar backgrounds and ability levels. It was also found that Catholic schooling lowers high-school dropout rates.

Schooling in the inner city

I recently completed a new study of the effects of Catholic schooling on high-school graduation rates.[1] My work contains an important qualification, one that is missing from most previous studies of Catholic schooling, but that has important public-policy implications concerning the use of public funds in private schools. In estimating the effects of Catholic schooling on various outcomes, Coleman and others compare the average outcome for all public-school students with the average outcome for Catholic school students. In some instances, they compare average outcomes in the two sectors by race, but they almost never make an attempt to define the effects of Catholic schooling with reference to a particular set of public-school alternatives.

For several reasons, I have adopted a different approach. To begin with, a disproportionate share of Catholic school students live in large cities. In addition, available data suggest that public schools in large cities perform poorly compared to other public schools. Finally, this urban-school performance deficit appears to be most acute in minority neighborhoods. So I set out to determine how differences in Catholic and public-school performance vary across different types of communities, with special attention paid to the experience of Catho-

[1] The paper, "The Effects of Catholic Secondary Schooling on Educational Attainment," was published in the January 1997 issue of the *Journal of Labor Economics*.

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lic school students in large cities. I divided students into four groups: urban minorities, urban whites, non-urban minorities, and non-urban whites. This allows me to compare Catholic schools and public schools serving similar populations of students.

My data, gathered from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY), demonstrate that Catholic schools succeed in communities where public schools fail miserably.[2] The public-school graduation rate for urban minorities is quite low, but the Catholic school graduation rate for urban minorities is actually higher than any of the graduation rates for white students. Ninety-one percent of blacks and Hispanics who attend Catholic secondary schools in urban counties graduate from high school. This figure does not include General Equivalence Diplomas (GED). In contrast, only 62 percent of blacks and Hispanics who attend urban public schools graduate. For urban whites, the Catholic school graduation rate is 87 percent while the public-school graduation rate is 75 percent.[3]

The 26 percent effect

However, critics of Catholic schools are quick to argue that Catholic as well as other private schools do not educate a random sample of students, that Catholic school students are, on average, from better educated and more stable families than public-school students. Therefore, high graduation rates in Catholic schools may arise because Catholic schools select good students, not because Catholic schools offer a better education.

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[2] The NLSY is a panel data set that follows over 10,000 young persons from 1979 to the present. These young people were born between 1957 and 1964. Therefore, they attended high school during the 1970s and early 1980s. For each respondent, I calculated detailed measures of family background and home environment. I also determined the population of the student's county of residence. If a county contains more than 250,000 persons, I designated the county as an urban county. I tried more restrictive definitions: However, the benefits of Catholic schooling appear to be greater when the urban sample is restricted to even larger counties.

[3] Because the NLSY contains a supplemental sample of economically disadvantaged white students, both of these numbers understate graduation rates for the typical white student. If we remove the economically disadvantaged whites from the urban sample, the public-school graduation rate is 79 percent and the Catholic school graduation rate is 90 percent.

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To address this issue, I constructed a statistical model of the determinants of high-school graduation. According to the model, the probability that a student graduates from high school is a function both of his individual characteristics and whether he attends a public or Catholic school. Students who report attending a private school that is not Catholic are eliminated from the sample. I applied this model to all four subsamples of students: urban minorities, urban whites, non-urban minorities, and non-urban whites.

The results are striking. Consider a representative minority student in an urban public school. The student is representative in the following sense: Based on his observed characteristics, his predicted probability of graduating equals the overall graduation rate for urban minorities in public schools, 62 percent. Now consider an urban, Catholic school student with the same observed characteristics (namely, parent's education, parent's occupation, family structure, and reading materials at home). The predicted graduation rate for this student is 88 percent. This is below the actual Catholic school graduation rate of 91 percent, but far above the public-school graduation rate of 62 percent. For students who are typical of urban minorities in public schools, Catholic schooling increases the probability of graduating from high school by 26 percent. This is an enormous effect. In today's labor market, young adults who finish high school, but not college, earn at least 15 percent more than high-school dropouts. Those who finish college earn even more.

I also examined the determinants of graduation rates for urban whites. Here, the effects of Catholic schooling on graduation rates are positive but much smaller. The public-school graduation rate among whites in the NLSY sample is 75 percent. Consider a white student who has a 75 percent probability of graduating from public school based on his family background and other observed characteristics. If this student attends a Catholic school, his probability of graduating increases to 85 percent. I performed similar analyses for white students and minority students in suburban counties, where I found small, positive effects of Catholic schooling on graduation rates. (The estimates of these effects are imprecise, however; there

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is the possibility that Catholic schooling has no effect on graduation rates for suburban students.)

The significance of higher graduation rates

Why do urban minorities in Catholic high schools graduate at such higher rates than their public-school counterparts? Like many decisions in life, the decision to finish high school is the result of a cost-benefit analysis. On the benefit side, most studies of test-score data find that students in Catholic schools learn more in a year than public-school students; and today, basic skills are an especially important determinant of labor-market success. In addition, Coleman and others have written about how Catholic schools create a sense of community and shared values that enhance the educational process. And the costs of public schools compared to urban Catholic schools are high. In many public schools, threats of physical violence or other forms of harassment greatly increase the cost of attending school.

Which of these factors contributes most to the astonishingly high graduation rate in urban Catholic schools is not entirely clear. However, it is clear that graduating matters for the economic futures of the young people involved. Even if we were willing to assume that Catholic school students learn at the same rate per year as public-school students, the fact that Catholic school students stay in school longer bodes well for their futures. Because they are more likely to finish high school, Catholic school students are more likely to attend and to complete college. This remains the case even when the effects of family background and home environment are removed.

Many scholars and commentators have recently noted the rising economic disparity between the well educated and the less educated in our country. Real wages for high-school dropouts have fallen substantially since 1980, and, given the changing nature of work in our economy, there is no reason to expect that the real wages of unskilled workers will rise significantly any time soon. If our cities continue to produce millions of young people who are not prepared for work, our cities will continue to be troubled places.

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Voucher experiments

Many advocates of large-scale plans to provide public money for private schools through tuition vouchers may point to my study to support their position. However, I believe that my results do not speak directly to the potential consequences of such plans. My study demonstrates that the existing stock of Catholic schools manage to succeed in precisely the communities where public schools often fail. However, we have no idea how the quality of Catholic or other private schools might change if full-scale voucher plans dramatically increased the demand for their services. Can the Catholic schools of Chicago, New York, or other cities increase their enrollment tenfold and still maintain quality without spending more per student than public schools currently spend? I am inclined to believe the answer is yes. Though no data exist to support my hunch.

But many experiments are underway with positive results. In Ohio, the state assembly has recently taken control of the Cleveland city schools, which were plagued by mismanagement and ineffectiveness. The reform plan, imposed on Cleveland by the state, includes a small voucher experiment. Only low-income families are eligible for the program, and the amount of the vouchers depends on family income. The maximum voucher is $2,250, and participating families are required to pay between 10 percent and 25 percent of tuition costs in the schools they choose.

One statistic provides the most compelling evidence that this program is needed in Cleveland. While the program provides vouchers for roughly 1,700 children, more than 6,000 families applied for the program. These families obviously believe that the public schools in their neighborhood are not serving their children well; they are so firm in this belief that they are willing to pay part of the tuition if the state will simply help them gain access to private education for their children.

Similar programs have been proposed, but not yet adopted, in both New York City and the District of Columbia. Over the past several years, Cardinal John O'Connor has repeatedly offered to educate the lowest performing 5 percent of children in the New York public schools. The Cardinal is offering to

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educate these children for roughly $2,500 per student; the public schools currently spend more than twice this figure per student. (The offer has not yet been accepted.) Last spring, Representative Steve Gunderson, a Republican from Wisconsin, sponsored a bill to establish a small voucher program for low-income families in the District of Columbia. The measure was included in a larger bill that authorizes federal funds for the District. But President Clinton threatened a veto, and a group of Democratic senators filibustered the authorization bill, effectively killing the proposal.

In wealthy suburbs, the public provision of services often works quite well. As a rule, sanitation crews keep the streets clean, the police answer 911 calls, and public schools educate children. But in the low-income neighborhoods of our nation's capital and other cities, the streets are not clean, crime is rampant, and public schools are in disarray. Many politicians who oppose vouchers in any form portray themselves as the true friends of the urban poor. However, they offer no viable alternative to vouchers; and meanwhile, economically disadvantaged families in our cities continue to suffer.

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Vouchers for religious schools

DENIS P. DOYLE

THE American public, if opinion polls are to be believed, overwhelmingly prefers private to public schools. A recent poll in *USA Today* reports that, among respondents with school-age children, 47 percent would use private schools "if they had the resources." Interest in private schools has a racial component as well; African Americans are much more likely to express a preference for private schools than whites, and, not surprisingly, African Americans report much lower levels of satisfaction with public schools than whites.

The ability to attend private school, of course, is largely a function of family income. For, as the sociologist James Coleman once pointed out, private schools face a significant "tariff barrier"; not only must they charge tuition to generate income but their "competition"—public schools—are so heavily subsidized that they are "free" to consumers. At the same time, almost without exception, public policy forbids the use of public funds to attend private religious schools, which account for 85 per-

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cent of private-school enrollment. Yet, if private schools are good enough for the discerning and the well off, why are they not good enough for the poor and dispossessed?

It's no exaggeration to say that the last unserved minorities in America are poor children whose families prefer private religious schools to public schools. Such an educational opportunity is simply not available to the poor except through charity and private beneficence, the one activity the modern welfare state was designed to render unnecessary. Imagine denying Medicare recipients the right to seek medical care in a Jewish, Lutheran, or Catholic hospital because of its religious character, or forbidding a Social Security pensioner from using Social Security benefits to be buried in hallowed ground. Indeed, one wonders what the state interest is in denying children access to private religious schools.

Church and state abroad

Our liberal-democratic neighbors across the Atlantic have certainly not found such an interest. In fact, ours is the only advanced democracy that does not provide public funds for children to attend private schools. While there are limits to comparative analysis, the tool is nevertheless a powerful one, providing insights that would otherwise not be available. In particular, comparative analysis shows us how different nations solve similar problems—with varying degrees of inventiveness. While almost all democracies provide public funds for children to attend religious schools, three countries in particular (Denmark, Holland, and Australia) offer distinctive insights into the practice.

The Danes have provided public funds for non-government schools since the creation of a national system of public education in the early nineteenth century. Because there was a state church, Evangelical Lutheranism was quite naturally taught in government schools. Anything else was unthinkable; just as the King or Queen was head of the Church, so too he or she was head of the state and the school. But the Danes are a tolerant people, and just as they would expect those who attended government schools to participate in religious activities, including devotion and study, they would not *impose* such obligations on every one.

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Thus parents who organize 24 children of school age are guaranteed the right to establish their own school (if they cannot find an existing one that they approve of) at government expense. According to *Danish Education*, the official publication of the Danish Ministry of Education:

> Today, various kinds of "free" or independent schools exist, all of them subsidized up to 85 percent ... the principle behind these large subsidies is that, although Denmark has an efficient education system ... it should be possible for people to choose an alternative kind of education for their children should they wish, whether their reason for this be ideological, political, educational or religious.

The Dutch example, which is no less striking, is more recent. At least through the nineteenth century, the Dutch—principally Catholic and Calvinist or Dutch Reformed—were deeply religious. Followers of both religious persuasions were convinced that religion and education could not be divorced. Both groups believed in a system of government-supported education for the masses; both were prepared to act on their convictions; and both were prepared to honor the religious traditions of the other. The result is the most broadly based system in the world for public support of religiously affiliated schools.

Today, 70 percent of Dutch children attend religious schools with public funds. Indeed, the Dutch Ministry of Education sees its role as primarily one of quality control and benchmarking, using government schools as indicators of cost and quality as they hammer out appropriations for education, most of which go to non-government schools. The practice is not without ironies. Dutch Jews—whose numbers are few because of the Nazi genocide—find it difficult to meet even the low threshold number of youngsters needed to support a school. Being flexible, however, the Dutch Ministry of Education permits tiny Jewish schools to exist. And with the end of the Dutch overseas empire, many Muslims now live in Holland: Some attend Islamic schools, while others attend Christian schools. And even among Christians, there is substantial freedom of movement among schools, with Catholics attending Calvinist schools and vice versa.

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Most relevant from an American standpoint is Australian practice. As continental democracies, not only do we share common-law traditions, a similar colonial heritage, a common language, and a frontier legacy, but our political and cultural circumstances are very much alike. The framers of the Australian Constitution adopted much of our constitutional language, word-for-word, including our First Amendment. Yet, unlike our Supreme Court, the Australian High Court has inclined toward the "free exercise clause," ruling that, so long as the state supports all religious schools equally (including nonreligious schools), and prefers none to the other, the wall of separation between church and state is not violated.

Australian support for families to attend private schools has an interesting history, orchestrated by a people's padre, Father James Carroll of Sydney (later Bishop Carroll, who died in 1995). Convinced that poor Catholics could not afford high-quality education and that they would not abandon their schools, Carroll campaigned energetically for public funding, convincing the Australian Labour party (the analogue of our Democratic party) to support the program. The result is an effective system in which poor children who attend low-wealth schools enjoy fairly generous stipends, while wealthy children in high-wealth schools receive only a nominal amount.

How is it that our fellow liberal democracies, almost without exception, provide funds for non-government, religious-based schooling, and we do not? The answer is not a pretty one, particularly to a people who pride themselves on a political tradition of tolerance and civility.

Anti-Catholicism as public policy

Few Americans are aware that the notion of "separation of church and state," insofar as it is used as a justification for excluding religious schools from public funding, is largely anti-Catholic in origin. Until the late 1840s, the states of New England supported two kinds of public schools, Protestant and what were euphemistically called "Irish schools." Both types of schools required students to engage in devotional activities—public prayer and Bible reading—but the Protestant schools used the King James version of the Bible while the

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Catholics used the Douay version. Not satisfied with the literary excellence of the Douay version, Protestant-dominated legislatures systematically began to disenfranchise "Irish schools." The nation was overcome by an unseemly nativism. Meanwhile, Protestant devotional activities—school prayer and Bible reading—continued without constitutional impediment until 1962, when they were struck down by the Court.

Indeed, so sure were the legislatures and courts that the practice of funding religious schools was legal—to either enfranchise or disenfranchise them as they saw fit—that no constitutional issues were thought to be involved. Not only was there no presumption of unconstitutionality, there was a positive presumption of constitutionality. It fell to James G. Blaine, a Republican from Maine, who served in the House of Representatives from 1863 to 1876 and was a colleague and friend of President Grant, to propose an amendment to the U.S. Constitution which would forever bar the "Popish" practice of providing aid to Catholic schools. Blaine and his supporters had no objection to religious education, so long as it was Protestant. Convinced of the necessity of protecting the young nation from foreign influences, the amendment—never enacted at the national level—was enacted, over time, in state after state, thus effectively eliminating aid to Catholic schools.

The overt anti-Catholicism of the Blaine amendment presents an extraordinary irony. Our first settlers were religious dissidents, and the United States was not hostile to religious differences at the time of the founding. To the contrary, the Northwest Ordinance had made available gifts of land for religious schools, and the first schools in the original 13 colonies were denominational and enjoyed public funding. In fact, the architects of the modern public-school system, Horace Mann for example, were themselves deeply religious and saw the new "common school" as fulfilling religious—though interdenominational—functions. Robust Unitarian-Universalists, they were convinced that schools must provide moral uplift, which was best achieved, in their view, by ecumenical Protestantism.

In the modern era, of course, separation of church and state is offered as a principled reason for not aiding families who want to send their children to private school. Yet the roots of the practice are as poisonous as any civil right's af-

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front of the modern era. Imagine framing a social policy in starkly anti-Catholic terms today. Indeed, the old saw springs to mind: Anti-Catholicism is the anti-Semitism of the liberal intellectual class. But, hostility to Catholics notwithstanding, the main "supplier" of private education in the United States is the Catholic church.

A Catholic education

Catholic schools make up more than one-half the private schools in the country, enrolling 53 percent of the nation's private-school students. The remaining attend either other types of religious schools (32 percent) or nonsectarian schools (15 percent). In the fall of 1990, there were 26,712 private elementary and secondary schools in the United States, enrolling 4.9 million students (contrasted to 89,000 public schools, enrolling 42 million students). To provide a sense of scale, about $25 billion of the total national expenditure of nearly $250 billion on elementary and secondary education is for private schools. A good rule of thumb is that private-school numbers represent about 10 percent of public-school numbers.

In 1930, Catholic schools enrolled 2.4 million youngsters out of a school-age population of approximately 26 million; in 1993, they enrolled 2.5 million youngsters out of a school-age population of 47 million youngsters. The high point of Catholic school enrollment was 1960, when 5.2 million students were enrolled (out of a school-age population of 36 million). Catholic schools were, during these early decades, among the most important socializing influences in America. They offered a safe haven for the immigrant and for immigrant families, providing a sense of familiarity and continuity in a confusing and often dangerous environment. Catholic schools acted as a buffer from the harsh realities of industrialization, a mediating structure that stood between the individual and the atomizing effects of unbridled free enterprise and anti-Catholic sentiment. Catholic schools, then, effectively fulfilled—and fulfill to this day—a public function, just as government schools do. They inculcate a sense of moral and civic duty in the student while providing the student with the necessary educational skills for further advancement.

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Yet after World War II, as America began to suburbanize, Catholic school graduates moved from manual to white-collar work and found themselves free to move from the ghettoes. At the same time, the nation's Catholic Bishops decided not to underwrite the funding of a new network of Catholic schools outside the central cities where they had flourished for a century. Anti-Catholicism was slowly ebbing, and, as Catholics moved to the suburbs in large numbers, enrollments began to plummet.

At the same time, however, total private-school enrollment was climbing, from 10.7 percent in 1979 to 12.4 percent in 1985; which is to say, non-Catholic private-school enrollments were increasing. Part of the growth was found in non-denominational schools, but the vast majority was in old main-line denominations and among religious groups that had historically not been major players, e.g., Conservative and Orthodox Jews and Eastern Rite Christians such as Greek and Armenian Orthodox.

The most important effect of Catholic school decline, however, was to shrink the pool of low-cost private education for the poor. Indeed, until the late 1940s, Catholic schools were, by and large, supported from the collection plate. But increasing costs, a declining number of religious teachers, and higher salary demands from lay teachers meant that Catholic schools began to charge tuition. And it was the "deductibility" of tuition payments from federal income tax that sparked the first major law suits about church-state separation. While it was—and still is—constitutional to deduct voluntary contributions, the Court ruled that tuition payments were not deductible because they were not voluntary.[1]

Don't exclude religious schools

Private schools should once again be made available to poor children. Yet the pressure to privatize, which is building across the nation, misses the most important part of the mar-

[1] A long line of decisions, culminating in *Lemon v. Kurtzman* and *Committee for Public Education and Religious Liberty v. Nyquist*, continued to narrow the sphere of action of state legislative and parental action. With the exception of issues like tax exempt status, textbooks, transportation, and fire and police protection, all other aid was effectively denied.

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ket: religiously affiliated schools. Chris Whittle, founder of the Edison Project, and John Golle, founder of Education Alternatives, argue that American public schools may be standing at the threshold of privatization, just as American health care was a decade ago. Indeed, the greatest hope of success for entrepreneurs like Whittle and Golle is the possibility of education vouchers, publicly funding parents rather than schools. They would not have to petition, hat-in-hand, school boards across the country. They would simply open their schools, a market would emerge, and private schools—public schools too—would sell their services to willing clients.

But, while it is presumptively constitutional for non-sectarian, private providers to participate in such a market, it is presumptively unconstitutional for religious schools to participate. An astonishing possibility emerges then: If voucher systems are created that do not include religious schools, religious schools may disappear.

Prosperous religious schools—Episcopal and Society of Friends schools, for example—and religious schools that exert as much cultural as religious pull—Armenian Orthodox or Orthodox Jewish schools, for example—as well as Christian fundamentalist schools, would not be much affected by being excluded from a voucher system. They would soldier on. The major impact would be to put other religiously affiliated schools at significant risk. Not only would they be competing with "free" public schools, they would be competing with "free" non-sectarian private schools.

As a nation, we labor under the ugly residual of more than a century of virulent anti-Catholicism, made all the worse by a steadfast refusal to acknowledge it. At issue is not ending "separation of church and state"—that is an old and honored tenet of the American constitutional and political tradition. Indeed, separating church and state is good for the church and good for the state—both are more vital for it. What is at issue, however, is the state's police power used to "separate church and child." Providing public funds for a child's education, whether or not that education is pursued in a religious setting, does no violence to the Constitution. And it is the last, best hope for many of the nation's poor children.

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Litigation's stranglehold on charities

SPENCER ABRAHAM

OUR civil-justice system is out of control. The research group Tillinghast reports that we spent $132 billion on this system in 1991 alone. That number includes money spent on courts, lawyers, and lost time. It represents two-and-a-half times what we spend on police and fire protection nationwide. These costs are only the beginning. The "tort tax" or cost added to products by lawsuits and lawsuit avoidance is 2.2 percent overall, but far higher for certain items. The tort tax adds $100 to the cost of a $200 football helmet, $20 to the cost of a $100 step ladder, $500 to the price of a new car, and $170 to the cost of a motorized wheelchair.

For years, Congress has attempted to address the litigation explosion at the root of these high costs. Unfortunately, we have only been able to pass limited reforms, and those aimed only at securities litigation. We need to do more. We need to move beyond even the limited product-liability reform recently vetoed by President Clinton. We need systemic reform that

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will reduce the number of lawsuits since it is not just product manufacturers and securities companies that are suffering. All of us are suffering from the litigation explosion. The temptation to sue has become too great in America. It has turned Americans against one another. And it has begun tearing down the essential bonds and institutions on which our society relies.

Although many bemoan the damage done to our economy by the litigation explosion, I would like to concentrate on the harm done to institutions that help us care for one another: charities and other nonprofit organizations. Nonprofit organizations are not the only victims of frivolous litigation; they may not even be the greatest victims. But, as I will argue below, they are extremely important victims of litigation; they are important for our survival as a nation and must be protected by systemic reform.

To reduce and end frivolous litigation will ultimately require initiatives at the state and local levels. However, leadership at the federal level will still be necessary. For frivolous litigation means more than a price increase on goods. Frivolous litigation is an attack on altruism itself.

The rise and decline of voluntarism

In *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville noted that "Americans of all ages, all stations in life, and all types of disposition are forever forming associations." Whether to repair a local road or combat drunkenness, Tocqueville observed, voluntary associations were Americans' answer to public ills. And, while the government might perform any one of these functions better than voluntary associations, "the morals and intelligence of a democratic people would be in as much danger as its commerce and industry if ever a government wholly usurped their place."

Tocqueville saw that private, voluntary associations are necessary to form bonds among people, to teach members of society to trust one another. Whether a local choral society or an informal group brought together by the need to repair a community building after a storm, nongovernmental associations bind people together. Particularly in democratic societies, in which we cannot be ordered to love our neighbor, we

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need to participate in associations so that we can learn to cooperate. Without some basic level of trust and cooperation, social, political, and economic institutions break down, leaving only violence and chaos.

Americans still value voluntary associations. And a key form of association for Americans, through which they learn to care for one another, is the nonprofit or charitable organization. We have a vast network of 114,000 operating nonprofit organizations, ranging from schools to hospitals to clinics to food programs, with total revenues of $388 billion in 1990. Meanwhile, revenues for the 19,000 support institutions (which raise money to fund operating organizations) came to $29 billion. Total revenues for religious congregations were $48 billion. That is $465 billion worth of nonprofit activity in 1990 alone.

Nonprofit organizations rely heavily on volunteers, and Americans gladly step forward. According to a 1993 report from the Independent Sector, a national coalition of 800 organizations, Americans donated 9.7 billion hours of their time to nonprofit organizations that year. This volunteer time produced the equivalent of 5.7 million full-time volunteers, and was worth an estimated $112 billion. About 15 percent of charitable organizations relied solely on volunteers in 1993. Four out of five reported using volunteers in the last year, more than half on a weekly basis. And approximately 69 percent of total volunteer hours were given to tax-exempt organizations (rather than, for example, the government).

Unfortunately, voluntarism seems to be declining nationwide. According to the Independent Sector report, the percentage of Americans volunteering dropped from 54 percent in 1989 to 51 percent in 1991 to 48 percent in 1993. Americans are also giving less money. The average household's charitable donation dropped from $978 in 1989 to $880 in 1993. The study also found a strong correlation between giving and voluntarism: "Households with one or more volunteers gave an average of $1,193 while households that gave money but had no volunteers gave an average of $425." The reasons behind this correlation seem clear: People who feel a commitment to an organization will give more to it, and those who volunteer develop this commitment more readily and firmly than those who do not.

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The decline of giving and volunteering spells danger for our voluntary organizations, for the people who depend on those voluntary organizations, and for the social trust that is based on the spirit of association. But why is voluntarism on the decline?

Obviously, there are a number of relevant factors. But one of the most important is America's litigation explosion. Volunteers now have reason to fear being sued without good cause. And the problem goes beyond voluntarism per se. Our society is getting less and less out of its nonprofit organizations because litigation is costing them more and more. Nonprofit organizations are forced to spend an increasing amount of time and resources avoiding, or preparing for and fighting, costly lawsuits. Thus litigation has rendered our nonprofit organizations less effective at carrying out their good works and less effective at helping people care for one another. It has also encouraged Americans to retreat more into their private lives and away from the public, social activity that binds them together as a people.

Liability and costs

For many decades, charities in almost all states were protected from lawsuits by the common-law doctrine of "charitable immunity." This doctrine provided blanket immunity to charities for injuries and wrongful acts but allowed injured parties to recover damages from volunteers and other employees. The rationale for extending immunity to charities was the role they were understood to play in dispensing important tangible benefits, such as poor relief and fire protection, and intangible ones, such as public spiritedness and civil trust. But a number of Americans considered charitable immunity unfair because it often left injured parties with no practical recourse. Many judges and legislators agreed. Thus by the 1940s, the doctrine was riddled with exceptions. By the 1980s, most states had abolished it altogether, through either judicial action or legislation.

Many observers welcomed the demise of charitable immunity, arguing that charities, like all other organizations, must see to it that no harm comes to those they serve and, moreover, that they should pay for any injuries occurring on their

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watch. Charitable immunity was indeed unfair in many ways. But its demise has brought unforeseen and often overlooked damage to nonprofit organizations. Elimination of this doctrine has exposed nonprofit organizations to the same explosion of frivolous, expensive lawsuits that have harmed the rest of our economy and society.

But nonprofits suffer from other costs as well. According to Congressional testimony given by John Graham on behalf of the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE), liability insurance premiums for associations have increased an average of 155 percent in recent years. Some of our most revered nonprofit institutions have been put at risk by these increased liability costs. Creightin Hale of Little League Baseball reports that the liability rate for one city league increased from $75 to $795 in just five years. Many leagues cannot afford this added expense, on top of increasing costs for helmets and other equipment. These leagues operate without insurance or disband altogether, leaving some neighborhoods without any organized sports for children.

To make matters worse, volunteers themselves often must bear much of the burden of increased insurance costs. For example, volunteer fire departments in Michigan require their volunteers to respond to emergency calls with their personal vehicles. This means that volunteers' personal (usually automobile) insurance is the first to be charged in any accident. The amounts generally far exceed the volunteers' insurance limits, so the relevant municipality ends up paying. But the volunteers' personal insurance premiums are also affected. Thus volunteer firefighters must not only risk life and limb but increased insurance premiums too. This is costly, unfair, and it is clearly a disincentive to volunteering.

Costs for volunteers can far exceed increased insurance premiums, and often for frivolous reasons. Congressman John Porter reports that, in August of 1990, a Chicago jury awarded $12 million to a boy who was injured in a car crash. And who was the "negligent" party? As it turns out, it was the estate of the volunteer who gave his life in his attempt to save the boy. Just as extraordinary sacrifice can be punished by frivolous lawsuits, so too can normal performance of one's duties. ASAE reports that a New Jersey umpire was forced by a court to pay

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a catcher $24,000. Why? Because the catcher was hit in the eye by a softball while playing without a mask. The catcher complained that the umpire should have lent him his.

Frivolous plaintiffs need not win in court to do damage. In 1982, a Little League coach in Runnemede, New Jersey, was sued by the family of a boy hit in the eye by a misjudged flyball. Claiming that the child was a natural shortstop, and thus that the coach was negligent in putting him in the outfield, the family haggled over the case until finally settling for $25,000. Thus litigation adds directly to one significant nonprofit cost of doing business: insurance. As a result, we have fewer funds available for providing services.

Moreover, insurance provided by outside companies generally comes with deductibles. Charles Kolb of the United Way points out that insurance deductibles for his organization fall into the range of $25,000 to $30,000. When, as has been the case in recent years, the organization is subjected to three or four lawsuits per year, $100,000 or more must be diverted from charitable programs. And the costs go beyond deductibles. Kolb reports that the costs in lost time and money spent on discovery (for example, going through hundreds of files to establish who did what when) can run into the thousands of dollars. Further, as William Cople, pro-bono legal counsel for the Boy Scouts of America, put it:

> The Scouts must spend scarce time and use up scarce human capital in preventing suits. For example, five years ago the General Counsel's office, a pro-bono operation, committed less than one hundred and perhaps less than 50 hours per year on issues relating to lawsuits. Last year we devoted about 750 hours to that duty.

Thus nonprofit organizations are devoting an increasing amount of their scarce time to legal defense work. They must do less good so that they can defend themselves from lawsuits.

Believe it or not

Frivolous lawsuits discourage voluntarism. Dottie Lewis, of the Southwest Officials Association, which provides officials for scholastic games, observes, "Some of our people got to the

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point where they were just afraid to work because of the threat of lawsuits." Contributing to this fear is the knowledge that one might do no harm and still be held liable. Take, for example, the case of *Powell v. Boy Scouts of America*. While on an outing with the Sea Explorers, a scouting unit in the Boy Scouts Cascade Pacific Council, a youth suffered a tragic, paralyzing injury in a rough game of touch football. Several adults had volunteered to supervise the outing. At least one volunteer apparently knew that the boys were playing football, but none observed the game. The youth filed a personal injury lawsuit against the Boy Scouts and the local Council, alleging that the Boy Scouts and its volunteers were negligent for failing to supervise him adequately.

The court dismissed this particular case, citing an insufficient connection between the Boy Scouts and the injury. Subsequently, however, the youth filed a successful suit directly against two of the adult volunteers. The jury found the volunteers liable for some $7 million. Oregon law caused the judgment to be reduced to something over $4 million—still far more than the volunteers could possibly pay. What is more, as Cople points out, "the jury seemingly held the volunteers to a standard of care requiring them constantly to supervise the youth entrusted to their charge, even for activities which under other circumstances may routinely be permitted without such meticulous oversight."

No one can provide the meticulous oversight demanded by the jury. Thus volunteers are left at the mercy of events (and juries) beyond their control. Such unreasonable standards of care penalize and so discourage voluntarism. They also penalize the nonprofit organizations and those they seek to help.

Len Krugel, Director of Social Services for the Eastern Michigan Salvation Army, reports that regulations and onerous legal standards often keep his organization from giving troubled youths a second chance. Because the organization is held responsible for essentially all actions by its employees and volunteers, it can take no risks in hiring and choosing volunteers. Thus the Salvation Army can neither hire nor accept voluntary services from any individual who has been convicted for drugs or driving under the influence. As Krugel observes, "If we can't give these kids a second chance, who can?"

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Andrea Marisi of the American Red Cross Counsel's office reports that her organization has been held liable on a number of occasions for the actions of individuals unconnected with it. Simply because these individuals have acquired (whether through earlier volunteer activities or even theft) and were wearing Red Cross T-shirts, the Red Cross has been held liable for many of their actions. For example, should a person accept a ride from someone with a Red Cross insignia and end up being injured in a car crash, the Red Cross will be held liable, even if the person wearing the insignia does not work for the Red Cross and is not driving a Red Cross vehicle.

The United Way is a national organization that sponsors numerous local nonprofit groups. Unfortunately, although it does not and cannot control these local operations, it repeatedly finds itself in court named as a defendant by someone claiming an injury caused by the local entity. Such holdings result from juries' desire to find someone with the funds necessary to pay for an innocent party's injuries. But this search for the "deep pocket" leads to what Marisi calls a "chilling effect" on Red Cross relations with other nonprofit organizations. Joint and several liability, according to which one defendant party can be made to pay for all damages, even though responsible for only a small portion, has made the Red Cross less willing to cooperate with the smaller, more innovative local agencies that might make it more effective.

Nonprofit organizations' lost opportunities are often more tangible than the foregone cooperation reported by the Red Cross. For example, the Michigan Salvation Army sought to set up a program for latchkey children and teenagers. The program would have resembled the state-sponsored and government-funded day care for teens proposed in President Clinton's "crime" package. But the program would have been designed locally and staffed by volunteers. Unfortunately, complicated licensing laws and the potential for lawsuits made the project a liability nightmare. The Salvation Army simply could not afford to undertake a project in which many children would participate in sporting activities and minor injuries would inevitably occur.

A major problem, according to the Salvation Army's Krugel,

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is the proliferation of local rules aimed at establishing responsibility for every possible injury. "Kids used to be allowed to play in the local ball fields," Krugel says, "but today there are so many bureaucratic rules about adult supervision and safety that parents and other volunteers want nothing to do with it, and the cities and counties simply don't have the funds to step in." But it is not merely the local governments that require bureaucratic rules such as background checks on adult supervisors, accreditation, and so on. The litigation explosion requires that voluntary organizations engage in such practices to protect themselves against lawsuits. As a result, the wellsprings of voluntarism dry up, and our children have fewer opportunities to participate in the kinds of activity that build communities and character.

Reform conflict-of-law rules

What, then, shall we do? It seems to me that we must again recognize the importance of our nonprofit organizations. Many states protect officers of nonprofit organizations but provide little protection for actual volunteers. Some states require that nonprofit organizations carry certain kinds or a specific amount of insurance to receive protection. Variation among states is to be expected and welcomed in our federal system. But the litigation explosion shows that the states do not have sufficient incentives to protect nonprofit organizations from frivolous lawsuits.

The federal government can help. Some members of Congress have submitted narrowly drawn legislation aimed at helping certain charitable organizations and individuals. The "Prosthetic Limb Access Act" would provide limited immunity for providers of recycled prosthetic limbs. The "Bill Emerson Good Samaritan Act" would extend limited liability to entities or individuals that donate or distribute surplus food to needy persons. Unfortunately, both bills were stalled in committee in the last Congress.

But there are other, more systemic improvements that we can make to our civil-justice system. We can begin by reforming our conflict-of-law rules. These rules govern lawsuits between parties from different states. One promising proposal, put forward by William Niskanen of the CATO Institute, would

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force those bringing suits to do so using the rules of the state in which the defending organization has the most employees. In the nonprofit context, we could include full-time volunteers.

With such a rule, states that reward frivolous lawsuits against nonprofit organizations would risk losing their economic benefits. Now it is true that states may be less anxious to retain a charity's headquarters than, for example, a GM plant. But consideration of the jobs involved would have some effect. A multi-state charitable organization like the Red Cross could move its center of operations, thereby escaping (and punishing) overly litigious states. Smaller, more local entities would benefit because their states would be better able to protect them from the negative externalities of other states' tort laws; and their states would benefit from more efficient and helpful nonprofit organizations.

But the main problem with the current conflict-of-law rules is that they give judges excessive leeway in determining which states' laws to apply in an interstate lawsuit. This, in combination with the plaintiff's prerogative to choose the forum in which to sue, creates a systemic pro-plaintiff bias. Large, multi-state nonprofit organizations cannot easily revise their price schedules (for vital products like blood, for example) to charge more for their goods in pro-plaintiff states like Alabama. They would thus have great trouble making up for those states' excessive damage awards. Their only other option would be to cease operating in certain jurisdictions. To weigh benefits and costs of operation in certain areas is a practice we do not want to encourage in our nonprofit organizations. What is more, most nonprofit organizations, even if they thought this way, would be too concerned for their reputations to pull up stakes and leave a pro-plaintiff state. Thus the nonprofit must accept higher costs and lowered efficiency, and all Americans lose a portion of their benefits—a classic case of negative externalities.

A federal conflict-of-law rule is the least intrusive way the federal government can prevent excessively pro-plaintiff courts from applying their rules to nonprofit organizations with most of their employees or volunteers in another state. This would short-circuit the process of fleecing out-of-state defendants.

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What is more, by using the law of the state in which the nonprofit has the largest number of employees, the rule would encourage in-state defendants to vote with their feet if state tort rules got too far out of hand. Combined, these factors would minimize negative externalities and make our federal system work much better as a market for tort law. And, given the plethora of forces working to protect injured parties (including elected judgeships and the influence of the trial bar), the result will not be unfairly "anti-plaintiff."

Federal action needed

Early in the last session of Congress, a number of U.S. Senators interested in legal reform considered a federal conflicts rule. They decided against it largely because other approaches that also seemed valuable, and did not intrude deeply into state substantive tort law, were being explored. These reforms principally addressed remedial issues, such as excessive punitive damages and joint liability rules, where it seemed that nobody could defend the status quo. But they did not solve the problem—the costs imposed by such excesses can be externalized on outsiders while the savings cannot be retained within the state. This surely represents the sort of interstate burden on commerce that the Founders wished to discourage and, in their view, justified federal intervention.

The most important reforms would eliminate the doctrine of joint and several liability and cap punitive damage awards. Each of these reforms would end particular abuses that have affected nonprofit organizations and volunteers. Each also would contribute to a friendlier atmosphere for our important associations.

Under the doctrine of joint and several liability, a plaintiff can obtain full damages from a defendant who is only slightly at fault. For example, in *Walt Disney World Co. v. Wood*, a woman was injured when her fiancee struck the go-cart she was driving at Disney World. The jury found her 14 percent at fault, her fiancee 85 percent at fault, and Disney only 1 percent at fault. But, under the doctrine of joint liability, Disney was required to pay 86 percent of the plaintiff's claimed damages. Nonprofit organizations like the United Way are particularly exposed to suit under the doctrine of joint and sev-

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eral liability because they assist numerous local nonprofit organizations. By replacing this unfair doctrine with proportional liability, we will reduce the incentive for plaintiffs to go to great lengths to include a "deep pocket" or well-funded defendant. The United Way would have to defend itself in fewer suits, and other organizations would be more willing to work with small, innovative organizations.

By capping punitive damages at $250,000 or three times the amount of economic damages, we would not harm anyone's right to recover for damages suffered. But we would reverse the trend toward claiming and collecting punitive damages even for relatively routine cases. We also would lessen the incentive to sue and so bring relief to all organizations.

These reforms failed to become law during the last session of Congress. But the battle continues. All of these reforms would encourage states to act more favorably toward nonprofit organizations, such that plaintiffs sue only when they have good reason—and sue only those who are responsible for their damages. Such reforms will create an atmosphere in which our fear of one another will be lessened, once again making it safe to join associations.

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From boys to men

DIANA SCHAUB

ONE has always heard that the United States is more violent than other nations, but the statistics still come as a shock. To document American exceptionalism, David T. Courtwright includes comparative homicide figures for a group of 16 developed nations from the mid 1980s. The homicide rates per 100,000 for males aged 15 through 24 show a gradual increase from .3 (among the refined Austrians) to 5.0 (among the perfervid Scots), with the United States soaring off the chart at 21.9.

The American penchant for violence is not recent. From the "wild west" to "wilding," from the natural frontier to the urban frontier, mayhem of one sort or another has been a constant of American life. In *Violent Land*,† David T. Courtwright seeks to explain this phenomenon and, particularly, to account for "the historical pattern of American violence and disorder." It turns out that violence in America—whether high relative to other nations or not—has always been unevenly distributed, often dramatically so. We learn that "seventeenth-century Virginia was a disorderly place, though the Massachusetts Bay Colony was not." Two centuries later, circa 1880, the homicide rate in the mining town of Leadville, Colorado, was 105 per 100,000, while Philadelphia's rate stood at 3.2. Another century later, in the mid 1980s, "the rate of homicide for young white men in California was more than eleven times that of Minnesota." Given the patchwork nature of the phenomenon, its cause cannot be attributed to something generic in the national character. It's not sufficient to say that we're just a rowdy lot.

Courtwright's explanation is marvelously simple, yet open to complex elaboration. It begins from an obvious gender-based discrimination—one that an earlier generation summed

† Harvard University Press. 357 pp. $29.95.

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up with the words "boys will be boys" (a line that good-naturedly exculpated the individual by incriminating the class). It so happens that the maxim is sociologically sound; in all cultures, it is men—*young* men, young *unmarried* men, young unmarried men *in groups*—who are given to violence. As the book's subtitle indicates, *Single Men and Social Disorder* are virtual synonyms. Nature apparently wills it so. When numbers are added to nature, the result is especially deadly. Courtwright examines the ethic of honor and vengeance that arises among bachelor hordes, the activities and vices they are given to (drunkenness, gambling, prostitution, gunplay), and the compounding effects of racism and irreligion. In sum, "violence and disorder occur most often in groups of armed, touchy, bigoted, intoxicated, undisciplined, unparented, unmarried, and irreligious young men."

IN the United States, such groupings have been common. As an immigrant nation, in which men often arrived without or in advance of women, America had an atypically high gender ratio (the number of males per 100 females) from the colonial period until after World War II. Women did not become the majority until 1946. The effects of this "men-first, families-later pattern of settlement" were aggravated by the concentration of the male vanguard in particular regions and locales—the frontier broadly speaking, and especially the non-agricultural frontier populated by trappers, miners, cowboys, and coolies. Courtwright has fascinating chapters on a variety of these overwhelmingly male and astonishingly bloody subcultures. As the details accumulate—the acts of aggression within the group, the destruction of the aboriginal populations (both human and animal), the squalidness of men left to their own devices (which led to as many deaths from disease as distemper)—one is struck by the disregard for life that men unanchored by women and families can come to feel.

Particularly interesting is the chapter on immigration policy and its consequences for the Chinese community in America. By the time Chinese women might have been expected to join their men in America, the Exclusion Act was in effect, greatly delaying the achievement of gender balance. In 1890, the Chinese gender ratio was 2,679 men to 100 women. Not surprisingly, "Chinese made up a disproportionate number of those who were arrested and convicted of misdemeanors and felony crimes in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries"—no "model minority" then. Also not sur-

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prising, although little known, was that some of the Chinese, forbidden to intermarry with white women by anti-miscegenation statutes and public opprobrium, resorted to polyandry. With the relaxation of immigration restrictions after World War II, the Chinese-American population rapidly balanced. With the ladies came lawabidingness. A statistic Courtwright does not cite, but which buttresses his case, is reported by James Q. Wilson and Richard J. Herrnstein in their book *Crime and Human Nature*: "In 1965, there were only five persons of Chinese ancestry committed to prison in the entire state of California."

The conclusion seems inescapable that it is the domesticating force of women that makes for civilization. As Courtwright puts it: "Though the story of the triumph of law and order on the frontier is often told from the vantage of determined marshals and hanging judges, it is more properly and essentially a story of women, families, and the balancing of the population." Moreover, American women were doing more than rectifying the gender ratio through childbearing. They took an activist stance against "the worst aspects of masculine culture," founding reform organizations of all types and spurring quite effective legislative crackdowns on commercialized vice (Courtwright joins a growing number of revisionist scholars who credit Prohibition a success). Beyond their inhibitory, "just-say-no" function, American women also raised the intellectual and aesthetic tone of American life through their sponsorship of an array of educational, cultural, recreational, and religious undertakings. Although Courtwright does not explore the hypothesis, this female version of pioneering (subjugating a continent overrun with men) may account for feminism's emergence in the United States, as well as its decidedly male-bashing character. After reading *Violent Land*, one is prepared to believe that American men needed bashing.

WE might well wonder why the saga of exceptional American violence didn't essentially end in the 1950s when the male surplus had disappeared and the great marriage, baby, and suburban boom was underway. As Courtwright sketches it:

> It was as if, in the late 1940s and 1950s, all the irenic planets in the American solar system had finally come into alignment. Gender balance, predominantly female immigration, widespread and

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> stable marriages, educational and employment opportunities, religious revivals, and low levels of alcohol and drug abuse all worked to diminish the number or constrain the behavior of America's young men.

And then came the sixties. If I might extend Courtwright's astrological metaphor, the much ballyhooed "dawning of the Age of Aquarius" brought us not "harmony and understanding" or "the mind's true liberation" but, instead, a rising crime rate, the sexual revolution (with all its portentous meaning for the institution of the family), and an epidemic of drug and alcohol abuse. Courtwright spends the final chapters of *Violent Land* trying to account for the breakdown and, in particular, the emergence of an "urban frontier" dominated by fatherless boys.

Courtwright gives a sensitive summary of the current explanations for the phenomenon: the "conservative" policy explanation (welfare dependency), the "liberal" economic explanation (structural unemployment), and the more bipartisan "culture of poverty" explanation. While not rejecting any of these, he adds yet another: "one that is both surprising and surprisingly powerful. It is the idea that illegitimacy and female-headed households are common in the ghetto because of a chronically *low* gender ratio." That's right: a low gender ratio. It turns out that too few men are just as bad as too many. The reasoning is that the availability of surplus women undermines female chastity and increases the likelihood that the male strategy of extorting sexual favors, without benefit of marriage, will succeed. Here are the relevant statistics, cited by Courtwright:

> Black America ... has had the lowest gender ratio of any of the country's major ethnic groups for the last century and a half.... The difference begins at birth. The gender ratio for black newborns typically ranges from 102 to 103, compared to 105 to 106 for whites. The higher mortality of black male children and young men causes the gap to widen with age. At ages twenty to twenty-four the black gender ratio is 97, the white 105. By ages forty to forty-four the black ratio is 86, the white 100.

Comparative historical and cross-cultural studies confirm that low-gender-ratio nations have higher rates of illegitimacy. Always placing the onus on men, Courtwright declares: "Given favorable sexual odds it seems that men everywhere act like, and produce, bastards."

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The corollary, unstated by the gentlemanly Courtwright, but evident in the language of the streets, is that women come to be regarded as, and all too often behave like, whores (a.k.a. "hoes"). On this point, the contrast to the western frontier could not be more marked. In the Old West, decent women were treated with courtesy by even the most hardened cases. On the new frontier, whether due to a low gender ratio or not, the very distinction between decent and disreputable has been lost. I suspect that feminism's sexual revolution—which is to say an ideological change—is as much to blame as skewed demographics. After all, there were female surpluses in many Eastern cities during the era of western expansion, but Victorian era Boston produced old maids, not unwed teenage mothers. (Courtwright mentions the role of "the overlapping sexual and media revolutions," but to feminism there is scarce a reference; women's responsibility for the contemporary plight of the family is consistently downplayed.)

DESPITE Courtwright's emphasis on rather deterministic factors like demography, he does not ignore the moral component. In the past, the gender imbalance and consequent violence were temporary and self-correcting problems—"passing migratory anomalies in a society dominated by Victorianism and the work ethic." Today, when the situation is more intractable and self-perpetuating—"there is no built-in mechanism," Courtwright notes, "to balance inner-city populations as there was along the frontier"—it seems the only possible solution is a moral one. Here Courtwright follows the best sociological tradition, namely that of Montesquieu, whose searching exploration of the physical determinants of social life was always conducted with a view to the moral causes within the power of man which might counteract deleterious circumstances. Enter "the new familism," the movement that acknowledges and seeks to reestablish the centrality of the family in the effective socialization of the young (males in particular). Courtwright concludes his book with an endorsement of the "social utility of the family," but is careful to point out that this "does not mean a patriarchal family, or one in which the father is the sole breadwinner," although it apparently does mean a family with a father.

Insofar as it goes, this is fine. However, we do not learn what would spark a renascence of male responsibility or what would make marriage an attractive, not just a dutiful, pros-

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pect. Of course, duties themselves become more attractive if you are the only one who can do them, in other words, if one is invaluable. But what is it that fathers in particular are to do if both the hegemonic and economic roles are no longer theirs? For the "new familism" to succeed, it seems to me that the notion of male honor, which takes quite a beating from Courtwright, will need to be revived and rehabilitated in some fashion. Courtwright is quite tonedeaf to an older attempt to do precisely that through the medium, interestingly enough, of an idealized Western frontier. Courtwright is highly critical of Westerns. According to him, "they apotheosized male violence and marginalized women and children." To the question, "Did the mass exposure of three generations of audiences to violent male adventurers in the guise of cowboys and other gun-toting western characters influence the level of actual violence in American society?" he gives an implied yes, even managing to bring the Vietnam War into it:

> The cattle frontier never closed. It just came back in technicolor. Or possibly in Southeast Asia. In many ways the best (though also the strangest) illustration of the pervasiveness of frontier myth in postwar America was the Vietnam War.

COURTWRIGHT may be correct about the inadequacies of the Western as description, but I think he is wrong about the Western's moral import. Whether it be a novel, a movie, or a television series, one Western after another demonstrates that proper male honor is in the service of women and children. It would be more sound to assert that the genre assisted in the domestication of the American male, by giving it an imaginative basis. Take *Shane*, the classic Western that pits hard-drinking, unmarried, ruffian ranchers against sober, married, security-minded farmers and culminates in the victory of the farmers. That victory would not have occurred but for the presence among them of two men: one, a husband, who recognizes that true security requires a willingness to hazard one's own life in defense of one's way of life; the other, a gunslinger gone good, who puts his expertise in the service of the new order based on families. The battle is seen through the eyes of a boy, with a boy's fascination with guns and status ("Can you shoot as good as Shane, Pa?" and later, "I bet you two could whip anyone"). That boy, and all the American boys who listened, received an education in the true meaning of manliness; a very large part of that education was a lesson about the subordinate status of manliness. War is for the sake of peace.

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Watching *Shane* today, we are reminded of something else (something a feminized age prefers to forget): namely, the needfulness of the manly virtues. Courage is far from being the sole or the highest virtue, but it is a virtue, and one that civilization could not dispense with. Courtwright tells us that men are biologically disposed to violence, but that disposition is presented as unfortunate, a vestigial tendency that becomes problematic like an inflamed appendix. Perhaps the incorporation of young males into the body politic would be more successful if our attempts to harness them also honored their natural spiritedness. Then we might see the looked-for transformation of "Boyz 2 Men"—of boys who will be boys to men who will be husbands and fathers.

We regret the untimely death of our former managing editor

Michael Andrew Scully

1949 - 1996

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Affluence and divorce

MIDGE DECTER

IN the late 1970s certain professional responsibilities required my attendance at an annual meeting of the American Sociological Association. At that particular meeting, there were two separate sessions devoted to papers in the then newly burgeoning field of women's studies. It was announced in the program that men would not be permitted to attend either of these sessions. Now, having at that time a certain interest of my own in the discussion of matters pertaining to women (I had just completed a book on the subject), I was most curious to learn what it was that female sociologists had to enlighten one another about so determinedly out of earshot of their male colleagues. Expecting to encounter some specifically sociological expressions of the feminist rage that had by then become so familiar in the academy, or perhaps the results of a formal study of certain darkly sexual thoughts and practices, I was both startled and bemused to discover that both of these sessions were devoted entirely to the subject of alimony. Among radicals, it seems, everything begins with ideology and ends with money. Or is it, rather, the other way around?

Reading Barbara Dafoe Whitehead's *The Divorce Culture*† reminded me of that long-ago meeting and of my obtuseness in having been surprised by what was revealed to me there. The book, an expansion of the author's highly celebrated article in the April 1993 *Atlantic Monthly*, entitled "Dan Quayle Was Right," provides a passionate depiction of the emotional and economic havoc wreaked in American society by the current undermining of family stability. In accounting for this phenomenon, she leans heavily on the idea of what she calls "expressive divorce," that is, divorce as a phenomenon brought about by "the individual's needs, desires, and feelings" rather

† Alfred A. Knopf. 195 pp. $24.00.

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than, as had once been the case, an unhappy "legal, family, and social event with multiple stakeholders." Evolved from a social institution into a condition for finding individual happiness—Whitehead significantly, if not exactly accurately, dates this process of evolution as having begun in 1965—marriage could no longer withstand the least pressure of unhappiness or even inconvenience. What followed, we are told, was a doubling of the divorce rate between 1965 and 1975.

THE reason the book put me in mind of those long-ago feminist sociologists is that, among its other achievements, it makes so vivid the degree to which the disaffection of women and what the author has dubbed "the culture of divorce" are bound up together—and how much both have to do with America's enormous wealth.

Not that Whitehead herself would put the case this way. She is too conscientious and careful a student of social phenomena to deal with, or even just arrive at, such a glaringly stated conclusion. Moreover, in her depiction of the divorce culture, there is no doubt that after children—who are, of course, its first and most deeply affected and wholly innocent victims—next in line of disadvantage, particularly economic disadvantage, are women. Nevertheless, what she tells us of the collective habits of mind and behavior that go to make up this culture leaves little doubt about the connection of these habits to the temper (or perhaps one should say distemper) of contemporary feminism. And contemporary feminism, like so many of the "isms" that erupted among us in the 1960s, depends on a kind of unacknowledged confidence that, in the end, one is surrounded by money.

The first and most basic symptom of this confidence, as well as the primary underpinning of "expressive" divorce, is the conviction that one's primary obligation is to oneself: To entangle one's own needs in the needs of others is slothful or cowardly or both; in any case, it is a form of now-obsolete weakness. From this conviction, of course, a number of others follow, among them, for instance, the idea that one is entitled to personal satisfaction in one's daily work and that hence there should be no special virtue in "merely" supporting one's family and no special credit owed for "merely" being supported. Indeed, once the door to it is opened, the varieties of personal satisfaction owed to oneself become legion. Marriage, which is after all by any definition—whether institution or mere relationship—a connection that necessarily involves two

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or more people getting through life under one roof, can only with difficulty at best withstand such a pressure of individual demand.

The question is could such ideas and demands come into play against any but a background of economic confidence? It is true that women who are divorced from their husbands, particularly if they have children, almost always suffer a palpable decline in economic condition. Still, in times or places of deep economic hardship and fear, it is highly unlikely that people, particularly mothers, are preoccupied with the issue of what they owe themselves beyond the next meal and the next month's roof over their head. The decade from 1965 to 1975, cited by Whitehead as 10 years during which the divorce rate doubled, were also, let us remember, years in which the country had genuinely settled into an enduring condition of great affluence: in which going to college, for instance, had become a matter of almost universal right; in which well-brought-up young men declared their intention to stay out of "the system" and roamed the world on checks from home; and, above all, in which young women were as a matter of course educating themselves to pursue careers and, at the same time, being urged to regard young men either as flat-out competitors or as merely supernumerary players in their lives.

Money, in other words, had simultaneously become the coin of both satisfaction and dissatisfaction. It takes a great deal of wealth, more than the world has ever seen, for that to happen.

NONE of this is made explicit in Whitehead's book; indeed, she has rather different fish to fry. The real gravamen of her discussion is not so much the divorce culture per se but what this culture has done, and is doing, to children. For within the family based on the satisfaction of personal needs, children have been having a very hard time pressing for their own. Many, many of these children, aside from suffering a certain decline in their standard of living, experience a notable lack of stability in family relationships. The father might or might not still be hanging around, might or might not still be supporting them emotionally and financially; chances seem to be that he will not be doing either, at least not to the children's satisfaction. The mother, now at work, will often be too pressured and distracted to see to her children's emotional needs and, sooner or later, will probably be dragging them into a step-family, where their feelings might or might not remain paramount to her.

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In a chapter entitled "Divorce 'for the Sake of the Children,'" Whitehead describes how in the first stages of the great flood of "expressive" divorce parents would comfort themselves, and indeed would be comforted by many so-called experts, with the idea that divorce was far healthier for children than living in a household full of unhappiness and domestic strife. (That among these experts were feminist scholars and therapists goes without saying.) But such a rationalization, politically approved though it might have been, could not stand for long before the evidence of those who, by and by, actually took the trouble to talk to the children. Thus studies began to show that the children of divorce experience at least some degree of deep distress for a long time, a few of them perhaps for life. In a better world, of course, such an observation might have stood to reason and thus might not have required the backing of full-blown longitudinal social research, but that is what seems to have been necessary, at least for the child-care industry. At this point in the book, the author's quiet, humane authority turns into a rather heated eloquence. The ethos of self-fulfillment, it is true, was never attractive, but when the children are brought into the picture, that picture becomes downright chilling to contemplate.

STILL, one is left asking, what follows from all this? As is so often the case with heartfelt social criticism, no matter how convincing, *The Divorce Culture* ends with only a series of large prescriptive generalities. While the author concedes that divorce is necessary in a society that believes in the ideal of affectionate marriage, and necessary, too, in order to protect women from marital brutality and violence, we must, she says, "dismantle" the divorce culture. How? By "chang[ing] the way we think about the meaning and purpose of divorce, especially divorces involving children." We must recognize that the choice of divorce is not merely an individual one but also has larger consequences for society: contributing to welfare dependency, necessitating the creation of a public bureaucracy devoted to parental tasks, burdening the schools, contributing to the tide of "fatherless juveniles filling the courts and jails," and increasing the risks of unwed teen parenthood.

Aside from the fact that the culture betokened by the above dire consequences is not the culture that Whitehead has dubbed "the culture of divorce" but the culture, precisely, of non-marriage, the "we" whom she urges to be mindful of such social pathologies is a very different group—one might more

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accurately say class—of people. And of the consequences of the non-marriage culture, no one in America can any longer be in the least unmindful. Indeed, for that culture, divorce, expressive or otherwise, would be a distinct step up. The galloping divorce rate analyzed in this book is, after all, a phenomenon specific to the middle and upper-middle classes, for whom the author has only two things to say. First, we must begin again to treat divorce as a morally consequential event. We must, as a community, cease to speak the language of self-liberation and return to the language of obligation and trust. And second, we must repair the relations between men and women, which in the workplace have become more comradely but in marriage have become increasingly fragile and conflict-ridden.

Now, such prescriptions are certainly fine and to the point, but they are, alas, a cart placed miles and miles before the horse. For who shall preside over the mythic committee that is to determine how we speak, and where is the shop with tools to repair the relations between men and women?

THE truth is, the divorce culture has come upon us not as the result of our selfishness—people have always been selfish—and not as the result of the tension between the sexes—that tension has been a permanent fixture of human existence—and not out of any unconcern for our children—children have seldom in history been so much attended to and so kindly treated as ours. The disarray, so well described in *The Divorce Culture*, is brought about by the fact that the lives we lead are in respect of ease and comfort and confidence and good health simply unprecedented. Never have so many, even the poor among us, had so much. We are disoriented. We do not know whether to laugh or to cry; we do not know whom or what to thank; and we cannot think of what there might be to want next. And so we giggle and preen and complain and forget our debts and keep on seeking for things (and sometimes finding them). In short, there is no merely social cure for what ails us.

But Barbara Dafoe Whitehead has at least helped us to stop kidding ourselves about one aspect of our lives, and that is a help. The rest—who knows?—may require the power of God himself.

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Mismeasure of man

STEPHEN M. BARR

STEPHEN Jay Gould's latest book, *Full House: The Spread of Excellence from Plato to Darwin*,† is a grab-bag of miscellany—his successful struggle with cancer, the disappearance of the .400 hitter in baseball, Plato's theory of ideas, the history of life on earth. Somehow though he manages to weave all of this together into a grand philosophical synthesis about the meaning of life and the nature of reality.

The root of much evil in the world, according to Gould, lies in the simple statistic called "the average," or at least in the confusions that it engenders in the popular mind. One average in particular bothers Gould a great deal, because it leads to an understanding of evolution that he thinks mistaken. The fact that the average complexity of organisms on earth has increased over time suggests to many people that natural selection is a mechanism for producing complexity and, therefore, ultimately, for producing us. Even many who accept what Gould regards as the atheistic implications of Darwinism "cling" to the notion that we are the goal of evolution, the highest rung of a ladder. If one looks closely at the fossil record, however, one finds, according to Gould, that evolution has no preference for complexity. A particular lineage is just as likely to evolve toward less complexity as toward more—if it can. However, since life started with one-celled organisms, it had, on average, nowhere to go but up.

Even though the average complexity of organisms has increased over time, one-celled creatures still (and always will) vastly predominate in number. We do not live in the vaunted Age of Mammals or the Age of Man, says Gould, but in the Age of Bacteria. Far from being the goal of evolution, we are, "a tiny twig on life's tree." This "twig" undergoes a kind of evolution itself in the course of Gould's book, reappearing as

† Harmony Books. 230 pp. $25.00.

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"a tiny twig on the floridly arborescent bush of life," "a tiny twig, born just yesterday on an enormously arborescent tree of life," and "only a recent twiglet on an ancient and enormous genealogical bush." Only our "parochialism" and "traditional human arrogance" (as opposed, one imagines, to the cosmopolitanism and traditional self-deprecation of bacteria) leads us "to continue our traditional support for our own cosmic importance," and "to continue to view ourselves as better than all others by cosmic design."

WHAT truly matters in evolution, Gould asserts, is not complexity but "success." For him, evolutionary success is a matter of counting, though he does not make clear why this is so or whether one should count by species or by individuals. That 80 percent of multicellular species are arthropods leads Gould to conclude that arthropods are more successful than we vertebrates. And even among the mammalian minority of vertebrates, "the greatest successes" are "bats, rats, and antelopes," not primates, who can boast only 200 species. However, to evaluate the success of a single species, such as Homo sapiens, the counting must be by individuals; and, on this basis, Gould judges bacteria to be the champions and the human race a flop.

There is a problem of consistency here, which Gould does not notice. There are more species of antelopes than of primates, but more human beings than antelopes; more species of fish than of mammals, but more dogs than snail darters. In any case, it is quite doubtful that proliferation of species is a sign of success. Homo sapiens has a flexibility made possible by his complexity, and, in particular, by his intelligence, which allows him to take advantage of a thousand ecological niches without fragmenting into a thousand different species. Nor does the number of individuals seem a more sensible measure of success. Size obviously has a lot to do with bacterial "success." There are more bacteria than people for much the same reason that there are more grains of sand than boulders.

Indeed, it is difficult to understand why Gould should stop at living things. There are vastly more molecules in the atmosphere than bacteria on (or in) the earth. Why is this not the Age of Air? And why should one not count the dust under one's bed and compare it to the population of China? Does not the fact that cosmic evolution has produced more dust particles than Chinese tell us something? One could even apply the same criteria to ideas. Disraeli observed that "Mormon

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counts more votaries than Bentham." We are worse off now, for more people will buy books on astrology than will buy *Full House*. Indeed, Gould's ideas could be said to be but a twig on the arborescent bush of human opinion.

Gould is overawed by other large numbers. The vast age and size of the universe in comparison to human scales are further evidence to him of human insignificance in the cosmic scheme. But these numbers can be looked at in another way. The universe must be as old as it is for life to have had time to evolve, and as large as it is for such huge times to be possible. (General Relativity relates the size and longevity of the universe.) Size and number are matters of physical requirements not "cosmic importance." There are basic physical reasons why living things must be small compared to the universe and large compared to atoms.

THE "plain meaning" of evolution for Gould is that we were not "meant to be here"; we are a cosmic accident. The emergence of complex beings may have been an inevitable consequence of evolution (even if not its "goal"), but that complexity did not have to take the form of high intelligence. Says Gould:

> If we could replay the game of life again and again, ... the [organisms] of greatest complexity would be wildly and unpredictably different in each rendition—and the vast majority of replays would never produce ... a creature with self-consciousness. Humans are here by the luck of the draw, not the inevitability of life's direction or evolution's mechanism.

Nor, he insists, are we here by some "cosmic preference." Gould seems strangely unaware that these considerations cut rather against atheism than against belief in a Creator. Religious believers say that we are here by the preference not of the cosmos but of God. It is atheists who imagine that evolutionary mechanisms, the inevitability of life's direction, or some cosmic necessity are sufficient to explain human existence.

Gould believes that the notion of "the average" has confused our ideas not only about the meaning of life but about the very nature of reality. It has left "a legacy as old as Plato, a tendency to abstract a single ideal or average as the 'essence' of a system, and to devalue or ignore variation among the individuals that constitute the full population." This gives rise to our cultural "hangup" over what is "normal." Opposed to this Platonic error is the Darwinian truth. The world is not

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"objectively divided into obvious categories. Taxonomies are human decisions." To those who claim that some "fundamental categories [are] invariant across time and culture," he replies, "Not so—not for these or for any subjects. Categories are human impositions upon nature." Even the idea that there are two sexes is, he claims, a recent cultural development.

IT is not clear what any of this has to do with Darwin or biological science, but it certainly has nothing to do with Plato. Averages are not "our closest operational approach to essences." An essence is the intelligible form of something and is not at all a statistical concept. If every person in the world were to be blinded, that would not make sightlessness normal for man or a part of his nature or essence. Nor is a blind eye merely an example of variation; it is defective as an eye, because it does not fulfill the biological function that is evident from its form. On these points, Plato, Darwin, and modern geneticists have no disagreement.

That categories are not "imposed upon nature" is, if possible, even clearer in the physical sciences. For instance, an electron and a photon are quite distinct kinds of things. That an electron has electric charge, and mass, and is a "fermion," while a photon is neutral, massless, and a "boson," involves very fundamental distinctions that are true across time and culture—indeed, to the limits of the known universe. The structure of the physical world turns out to be expressible in the forms of mathematics, the very realm of pure essences. It is not an accident that some of this century's greatest mathematicians and mathematical physicists have considered themselves Platonists.

The stated aim of this book is to "complete the Darwinian revolution." But there have been other revolutions since Darwin—in physics, mathematics, cosmology, and molecular biology—and they too have things to teach us about the universe and about man, things one will not learn from this book. I recommend it, however, for those who take pleasure in fossils.

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Into the melting pot

ELLIOTT ABRAMS

PETER Salins's book *Assimilation, American Style*† is a labor of love as much as of scholarship. A child of immigrants who became editor-in-chief of *City Journal* and later professor of urban affairs and planning at Hunter College, he has lived the American Dream. But, as he chronicles in his new book, the dream is being challenged by ideologues on the left and right. The rise of ethnocentricity on the left and nativism on the right is today threatening the American immigration-to-assimilation ideal. Salins's book describes how the ideal should work, and did work for generations of immigrants like himself, and decries the new assault that would split American society into tribes and bar additional immigration.

Salins's basic argument can be set forth briefly. The American system did not require immigrants actually to jump into the melting pot and abandon their old customs. The nation had a positive and confident view of immigration. It was natural that people would wish to come here, for this was the best country; and it was natural to allow them in, for we needed them to populate our lands and work in our fields and factories. Our culture was superior, and they would see that and adapt to it.

An unofficial "contract" with immigrants had three elements: immigrants would adopt English, identify with their new homeland, and live by the precepts of the Protestant work ethic. This contract created what Salins calls the three unifiers: cultural (through English), civic (through national identification and pride), and values (through the Protestant ethic). If immigrants accepted the deal, America was fairly relaxed about other cultural matters: "assimilation, American style is not about cultural conformity; it is about national unity." While other

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nations demanded that the immigrant repudiate his own culture and adhere to the "behaviors and customs of the majority," America has been "much more flexible and accommodating." Immigrants "are free to retain or discard as much or as little of their homeland cultures as they wish without compromising their assimilation."

Ethnic diversity was not a problem because American-style assimilation tolerated very large amounts of diversity. Furthermore, the "American Idea"—by which Salins means Americans' worship of the Constitution, their description of the country along ideological rather than racial or ethnic lines, and their belief that newcomers could become good Americans—made immigration legitimate and gave immigrants a secure place in America's understanding of itself. "Time and again," Salins reports, "Americans learned to accept, socialize with, and eventually marry their immigrant neighbors because the American Idea made it the natural thing to do."

THERE were always challenges to this system. German and Scandinavian immigrants in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries sometimes pushed for official bilingualism—social reformer Carl Schurz is a prime example. The intense concentration of Germans in certain areas gave rise to a nativist reaction. Few were immune, and, as early as 1751, Benjamin Franklin complained:

> Why should the Palatine boors be suffered to swarm into our settlement and by herding together establish their language and manners to the exclusion of ours? Why should Pennsylvania, founded by the English, become a colony of aliens who will shortly be so numerous as to Germanize us instead of our Anglifying them?

According to Salins, though such fears existed, the early American attitude was one of "passive assimilation." When much larger waves of immigrants arrived in the late nineteenth century, "active assimilation" was adopted in order to assure that immigrants did indeed become Americans. The primary tool was the public school, and the lessons taught there, and on public occasions, drilled the new arrivals on the importance of Americanism.

Salins's account may be too benign in its description of the American approach, at least in one key respect: The toleration of cultural differences may have been premised on the belief that they were passing fancies. Although the immigrants might

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continue to speak and dress oddly, their children would assimilate more thoroughly. It seems likely that Americans were tolerant of the quaint vestiges of immigration because they were confident of the power of American culture to wipe them out.

Salins pays too little attention as well to the impact of intermarriage. While he presents the data (57 percent of Jews now marrying Christians, 84 percent of Polish-Americans and 73 percent of Italian-Americans now marrying outside their ethnic group, 65 percent of Japanese-Americans marrying non-Japanese), he writes of the "survival of ethnic and religious attachments despite the prevalence of intermarriage" and says that "intermarriage does not eradicate ethnic identities." Most sociologists would differ, at least with respect to the children and grandchildren of such marriages. Intermarriage is a chain phenomenon, which increases with each generation and slowly erodes ethnic identities.

SALINS follows up his description of the American System that worked so well—perhaps too well—to assimilate immigrants with an analysis of what has gone wrong. He believes that anti-immigration forces are rising in influence precisely because the old assimilationist model is under attack, leaving many to wonder if more recent immigrants will really become Americans. Bilingualism in the schools and what he calls "ethnic federalism"—the divisive spoils system fueled by affirmative action—are now being pushed by foundations, liberal elites, government entities, and the leadership of the black and Hispanic communities. He laments this development both because it undermines our sense of common citizenship and because it reduces support for immigration.

As Salins shows, most recent immigrants are in fact still signing on to the old "assimilation, American style" contract. Many Hispanics, for example, are buying the old deal—the problem here seems to be not the immigrants themselves but what he calls a "vocal and politically influential cadre of activists" who are "working assiduously to counter the natural forces of Hispanic assimilation." Similarly, the black community faces a greater difficulty now that the battles over legal discrimination are won. They must struggle between "the unexciting work of consolidating the victories of the civil rights revolution—in other words, helping blacks to assimilate" and finding "a new basis for grievance and alienation from mainstream American society." Blacks were for much of American history

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excluded from the assimilationist paradigm, and, now that their inclusion is sought, some in the community and its leadership reject that model entirely. For Salins, such anti-assimilationist politics represent a tragic turn of events, threaten society as a whole, and set a pernicious example for other minority and immigrant groups.

Salins's solutions are entirely logical: End affirmative action and "ethnic federalism"; restore the good reputation of assimilation as a feature of American society; use the public schools to promote national unity rather than divisiveness; and welcome more immigrants. He also writes that the immigration system should be reformed so that it does not undermine the American assimilationist model. We should be tougher on illegal immigrants; we should admit a large but stable number of people each year and should prevent too many people from one country from coming at one time; we should select immigrants essentially on a first-come, first-served basis; and we should encourage immigrants to become citizens. This would allow America to be "true to its immigration heritage," but would also "assuage nativist fears" that immigration is getting out of hand.

SALINS's whole effort here is to defend the American model of high immigration levels accompanied by unforced but almost irresistible assimilation. His anger at the marauders who are attacking the history and practices he prizes is a great strength of the book. Indeed, Salins's love for the American system gives *Assimilation, American Style* a kind of poignance. If we abandon the assimilation model, he fears, ethnic divisions will grow, embittering American life as they now embitter so many other multi-ethnic societies.

It would seem implicit (though Salins never says so directly) that if the changes he calls for cannot be achieved, he would not be able to defend continued large-scale immigration, as it would now deepen those divisions. Just how we are to conquer the multiculturalists and reclaim the schools, or how we are to revive the reputation of the very idea of assimilation, is not explained here. But Salins's diagnosis is powerful and persuasive, and surely the first step is the one he takes: to understand how and why the American model worked so well, and how it is now being threatened.

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